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THE

CASTLE OF EHRENSTEIN.

VOL. I.

THE

CASTLE OF EHRENSTEIN;

ITS LORDS

Spiritual and Temporal;

ITS INHABITANTS

Earthly and Unearthly.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF
"HEIDELBERG;" "THE STEP-MOTHER;" "THE SMUGGLER;"
ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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EHRENSTEIN.

CHAPTER I.

It was an awfully dark and tempestuous night; the wind howled in fury through the trees, and round the towers; the large drops of rain dashed against the casements, the small lozenges of glass rattled and clattered in their leaden frames, and the thick boards of the oaken floor heaved and shivered under the force of the tempest. From time to time a keen blue streak of lightning crossed the descending deluge, and for an instant the great black masses of the forest, and the high and broken rocks around, appeared like spectres

of a gone-by world, and sank into Egyptian darkness again, almost as soon as seen; and then the roar of the thunder was added to the scream of the blast, seeming to shake the whole building to its foundation.

In the midst of this storm, and towards one o'clock in the morning, a young man, of about one-and-twenty years of age, took his way silently, and with a stealthy step, through the large old halls and long passages of the castle of Ehrenstein. His dress was that of one moving in the higher ranks of society, but poor for his class; and though the times were unusually peaceful, he wore a heavy sword by his side, and a poniard hanging by a ring from his girdle. Gracefully yet powerfully formed, his frame afforded the promise of great future strength, and his face, frank and handsome without being strictly beautiful, owed perhaps more to the expression than to the features. He carried a small brazen lamp in his hand, and seemed bound upon some grave and important errand, for his countenance was serious and thoughtful, his eyes generally bent

down, and his step quick, although, as we have said, light and cautious.

The room that he quitted was high up in the building, and, descending by a narrow and steep staircase, formed of large square blocks of oak, with nothing but a rope to steady the steps, he entered a long wide corridor below, flanked on one side by tall windows like those of a church, and on the other by numerous small doors. The darkness was so profound that, at first, the rays of the lamp only served to dissipate the obscurity immediately around it, while the rest of the corridor beyond looked like the mouth of a yawning interminable vault, filled with gloom and shadows. The next moment, however, as he advanced, a blazing sheet of electric flame glanced over the windows, displaying their long line upon the right, and the whole interior of the corridor. Here and there an old suit of armour caught the light, and the grotesque figures on two large antique stone benches seemed to grin and gibber in the flame. Still the young man walked on, pausing only for one moment at a door on

the left, and looking up at it with a smile somewhat melancholy.

At the end of the corridor, on the left, he came to a larger staircase than that which he had before descended, and going cautiously down, and through some other passages, he found himself in a small vestibule, with two doors on either hand. They were of various dimensions, but all studded with large nails, and secured by thick bands of iron; and turning to the largest of the four, he quietly lifted the latch, and pushed it open. The wind, as he did so, had nearly blown out the lamp, and in suddenly shading it with his hand, he let slip the ponderous mass of woodwork, which was blown back against its lintels with a dull clang, which echoed far away through the vaulted passages of the castle.

The young man paused and listened, apparently fearful that his proceedings might be noticed; but then, as all was silent till a loud peal of thunder again shook the ear of night, he opened the door once more, carefully shading the lamp with his cloak. Then,

closing the door gently behind him, he turned a large key that was in the lock, seemingly to ensure that he should not be followed. He was now in a vast old hall, which seemed to have been long unused, for there were manifold green stains upon the stone pavement, no customary rushes strewed the floor, no benches stood at the sides, and the table, at which many a merry meal had passed, was no longer to be seen. A number of torn and dusty banners and pennons, on the lances which had borne them to the field, waved overhead, as the wind, which found its way through many a broken lozenge in the casements, played amongst these shreds of departed glories. A whispering sound came from them likewise, and to an imaginative mind like that of the youth who walked on beneath them, some of the rustling banners seemed to ask, "Whither, whither?" and others to answer, "To dust, to dust."

In the middle of the hall he paused and thought. A degree of hesitation appeared to come over him; and then, murmuring

"It must be all nonsense; but, true or not, I have promised, and I will go," he walked forward to another door at the far end of the hall, much smaller than that by which he had entered. Apparently, it had not been opened for a long time, as a pile of dust lay thick against it. There was no key in the lock, and it seemed fastened from the other side. After pushing it, however, to see if it would give way, the young man drew forth a key, saying to himself, "Perhaps this opens all," and applying it, after some examination of the key-hole, he turned it, and threw back the door. Then holding up the lamp ere he entered, he gazed into the space before him. It was a low narrow passage in the stone-work, with no windows, or even loopholes, perceptible; but yet the damp found its way in, for the walls were glistening all over with unwholesome slime. The pavement, too, if pavement indeed there was at all, was covered thickly with a coating of black mould, from which, every here

and there, sprang up a crop of pale sickly fungi covered with noxious dew, spreading a sort of faint, unpleasant, odour around.

So foul, and damp, and gloomy looked the place, that it evidently required an effort of resolution on the young man's part to enter; but after pausing for a moment he did so, and closed and locked the door behind him; then turning round, he looked on, still holding up the lamp, as if he expected to see some fearful object in the way: all was vacant, however, and as the faint rays of light dispersed the darkness, he could perceive another door at the end of the passage, some twenty yards in advance. It, when he reached it, was found unfastened, and on drawing it back —for it opened inwards—the top of a flight of stone steps was before him, descending, apparently, into a well.

It was no faint heart that beat within his bosom, but those were days in which existed a belief almost universal in things which our more material times reject as visionary; or which, at least, are only credited by a few, who

can see no reason why, in the scheme of creation, there should not be means of communication between the spiritual and the corporeal, or why the bond of mortal life once dissolved, the immortal tenant of the fleshly body should not still feel some interest in the things of earth, amongst which it moved so long, and have the power and the permission to make its presence felt for warning and for guidance. It is very different to feel an awe and a dread in any undertaking, and to shrink from executing it. The young man did feel awe, for he was going in solitude and the midst of night into places where mortal foot rarely trod, where every association and every object was connected with dark and dreary memories, and with still more gloomy anticipations—the memorials of the dead, the mouldering ruins of fellow-men, the records of the tomb, the picture of all that warm existence comes to in the end. He stopped for a moment there, and gazed down into the dark void below, but the next instant, with a slow and careful foot upon the wet and

slippery steps, he began the descent. The air, which was sultry above, felt cold and chilling as he descended, and the lamp burned dim, with a diminished flame, from the impure vapours that seemed congregated in the place. Each step, too, produced a hollow echo, ringing round, and decreasing gradually in sound, both above and below, till it seemed as if voices were whispering behind him and before him. Twice he paused to listen, scarcely able to persuade himself that he did not hear tongues speaking, but as he stopped the sound ceased, and again he proceeded on his way. The square cut stones forming the shaft in which the staircase turned, with the jointing only more clearly discernible from the mortar having dropped out, soon gave way to the more solid masonry of nature, and the rude rock, roughly hewn, was all that was left around him, with the stairs still descending in the midst. A hundred and seventeen steps, some of them perilous from decay, brought him, at length, to the termination, with a door ajar at the foot. All was

darkness beyond, and though there seemed a freer air as he pulled the door back, and the lamp burned up somewhat more clearly, yet the vast gloomy expanse before him lost scarcely a particle of its gloom, as he advanced with a beating heart, bearing the light in his hand. He was unconscious of touching the door as he passed, but the moment he had entered it swung slowly to, and a solemn clang echoed through the vault.

Laying his left hand on his dagger, he turned suddenly, and looked behind him, but there was no one there, and he saw nothing but the heavy stone walls and low groined arches, which seemed spreading out interminably on either side. The next moment a bat fluttered across, and swept his face with its cold dewy wing, nearly extinguishing the lamp as it passed; and then, as he took a few steps forward, a low voice asked, "Who is he?"

"Who? who?" several other voices seemed to say; and then another cried, "Hush!"

The young man caught the lamp in his left

hand, and half drew his sword with his right, demanding aloud, "Who spoke?" There was no reply but the echo of his own voice amidst the arches; and holding the lamp before him, he turned to the side from which the first question seemed to proceed, and thought he saw a figure standing in the dim obscurity, at a few paces distance. "Who are you?" he cried, stepping forward, but there the figure stood, grew more defined as the rays fell upon it, and the eyeless grinning head, and long mouldy bones of a skeleton appeared, bound with a rusty chain to a thick column. Instinctively he started back, when he first discovered what the object was, and as he did so, a low, wild, echoing laugh rang round through the arches on every side, as if mocking the horror which his countenance expressed. Nothing showed itself, however, and, ashamed of his own sensations, he drew his sword out of the sheath, and walked quickly on. His path soon became encumbered, and first he stumbled over a slimy skull, then trod upon some bones that

cranched under his feet, while strange whisperings seemed to spread around him, till, with no light joy, he saw the farther wall of the vault, with an open arch leading out into some place beyond. When he had passed it, however, the scene was no less sad and gloomy, for he seemed now in a vast building like a chapel, where, ranged on either hand, were sepulchral monuments covered with dust, and between them long piles of mouldering coffins, with overhead a banner here and there, gauntlets, and swords, and tattered surcoats, the hues of which could scarcely be distinguished through the deep stains and mildew that covered them. Here frowned the figure of a warrior in black marble, there lay another hewn in plain stone; here stood a pile of coffins, with the velvet which once covered them, and the gold with which they were fringed, all mouldering in shreds, and offering a stern comment on the grossest of human vanities, that tries to deck the grave with splendour, and serves up the banquet of the worm in tinsel. When he had half

passed along the solemn avenue, he thought he heard a sound behind, and turned to look, but there was nothing near except three small coffins and the marble effigy of a lady kneeling in the attitude of prayer. When he turned round again, a sudden light, blue and pale, like that of the unconfirmed dawn, shone through the long arcades, wavered and flickered round, as if moving from place to place, though whence it proceeded he could not see; but as he strode on, it served to show him a large snake, that darted from under the crumbling base of one of the monuments, and glided on along the path before him, as if guiding him on his way.

"By Heaven! this is all very strange and horrible," he exclaimed, and instantly there was a wild "whoop," coming from several parts of the chapel. The pale light that shone around was extinguished, and nought remained but the dim lamp in his own hand.

He would not be turned back, however, but hurried only the more quickly forward

till he reached a door at the opposite side. It was bolted within, but not locked; and pulling back the iron bar from the staple, he rushed out, the strong gust of the night air and the pattering drops of rain instantly extinguishing the lamp. A shrill scream met his ear as the door swung to behind him; but nevertheless he paused, and put his hand to his brow, with sensations in his bosom which he had never felt before, and which he was ashamed to feel.

While he thus stood a fierce flash of lightning blazed around, dazzling his eyes for a moment, but serving to show him the exact point of the rocky hill which he had now reached, and a path winding on down the woody descent, narrow, rough, and stony, looking more as if it had been traced by some torrent pouring down the side of the slope, than by the foot of man. Along it he turned his steps, guided by the trees and bushes, which rendered it impossible that he should miss his way, till, nearly at the bottom of the hill, a faint light

shone before him from the window of what appeared a little chapel.

"The good priest is watching for me," the young man said to himself; and hurrying on he gained a small projecting point of the rock which stood out clear from amongst the trees. Like many another jagged fragment of crag in that wild country, it towered up above the surrounding objects like a ruined outwork of the castle above, and when he had climbed to the summit, the young wanderer turned to gaze up at the building he had just left. All was dark and gloomy; not a ray broke from window or loophole, except at one spot where a blaze shone forth upon the night high up in the sky, shining red and hazy through the tempestuous air, like some star of evil omen. But the youth heeded not that light; he knew well that it was the beacon on the highest pinnacle of the donjon, beside which, under shelter of the watch-tower's roof, the weary sentinel was striving to keep himself awake, perhaps in vain.

The rest was all as obscure as the world beyond the tomb, and satisfied that his going had not been marked, he hurried on to the little chapel or hermitage, and lifted the latch.

CHAPTER II.

THE interior of the building into which the young man now entered, afforded a strange contrast to the wild and fearful scenes through which he had just passed. It was like life and death side by side—the world and the grave; and the change struck him as much, or perhaps more, than if the particulars had been reversed. It was a little cell, dependent upon the neighbouring monastery, with a chapel attached to it, dedicated to Our Lady; but the room into which the door immediately led was one of the two dwelling-chambers of the priests, who came up there in weekly turn to officiate at the chapel. It was low-roofed and small; but, nevertheless, it had an air of comfort and cheerfulness about it; and the large

well-trimmed lamp showed the whole extent, and left not one corner in obscurity. A little table stood in the midst, with the good priest seated at it: a book open before him, and another closed at his side; but besides these objects of study or devotion, the table bore several things connected with our corporeal comfort, which showed that at all events the chapel was not a hermitage. There was a well-roasted capon, and two or three rolls or small loaves of white bread—a rarity in that part of the country, and at that time; and besides these, there appeared two or three neat glasses with twisted stalks, and a capacious green bottle, large in the bulb, flattened at the sides, and with a neck towering like a minaret. It was a very promising vessel indeed, for its peculiar shape, form, and thickness, were too expensive to be in general bestowed upon bad wine; and the monks were supposed in those days, as at present, to be very accurate judges of what was really good.

Amongst the most cheerful things in the place, however, was the countenance of the

priest himself. He was a man of somewhat more than sixty years of age, but fresh, firm, and unbroken, with a complexion which, originally fair and smooth, seemed only to have grown fairer and more smooth with years; and though the untonsured part of his hair was as white as driven snow, his blue eye was as clear and bright as in youth. His features were high and somewhat aquiline, his eyebrows long and white; but that which denoted age more than aught else, was the falling in of the lips by the sad ravages of time upon those incessant plagues of life — the teeth. His countenance was a cheerful and contented one; not without lines of thought, and perhaps of care; but to the eye of one accustomed to read the character upon the face, the expression would have indicated a temperament and disposition naturally easy and good-humoured, without any want of mental energy and activity.

"Ah! Ferdinand," he said, as soon as he beheld his visitor, "you have kept me long, my son, but that matters not—it is a terrible

night, and the way somewhat troublesome to find. But, all good angels! what makes you look so pale, boy? Yours is not a cheek to turn white at a flash of lightning. Sit down, sit down, my son, and refresh yourself. See, I have provided for your entertainment."

"The way is a terrible one, good father," replied the young man, seating himself, and resting his arm upon the table, "and it is one I will never tread willingly again, unless it be to return home this night, though that I would not do, if there were any way of avoiding it."

"Why, how now, how now?" asked the priest. "Never let it be said that you have been frightened by a score of old monuments, and a few dry bones."

"That's not all, good Father, that's not all," answered the young man; and he proceeded to relate, in a low voice, all that he had heard and seen as he came thither.

"Phantasms of the imagination!" exclaimed the priest. "Voices in the serfs' burying-place! lights in the chapel vaults! No, no, good youth, such things are quite impossible;

these are but tales of the castle hall, told in the winter's evening round the fire, which have so filled your imagination that you realize them to yourself in a dark, stormy night, and a gloomy place. I have gone up there a hundred times, by night and day, and never yet saw aught but old crumbling stones and mouldy arches, and fleshless bones here and there; things fitted, surely, to produce solemn thoughts of the mortality of man's frame, of the vanity of all his works, and the emptiness of his glory, but not to fill your head with fancies such as these."

"But, Father, I tell you I heard the voices as distinctly as I hear you speak," the youth rejoined, in a half angry tone; "that I saw the light as plainly as I see this before me."

"A flash of lightning," replied the priest.

"No, no," answered his companion, "I never saw a flash of lightning that lasted uninterrupted, calm, and quiet, for five minutes, nor you either, father; nor did I ever hear the thunder ask, 'Who is he?' nor laugh and hoot like a devil. I would not have believed it

myself, had I not had eyes and ears to witness; and so I cannot blame you for doubting it. I never was a believer in ghosts or phantoms, or spirits visiting the earth, till now. I thought them but old women's tales, as you do."

"Nay, nay," exclaimed the priest, eagerly, "I did not say that;" and he fell into a deep fit of thought before he proceeded farther. At length he continued, in a grave tone, saying, "You must not suppose, Ferdinand, that I doubt, in any degree, that spirits are at times permitted to visit or revisit this world. We have the warrant of Scripture for it, and many facts of the kind are testified by fathers of the church, and holy men, whom it would be a sin to suspect of falsehood, and a presumption to accuse of foolishness. But I do think that in thousands of instances where such apparitions are supposed to have taken place, especially in the present day, there is much more either of folly or deception than of truth. In this case, although I have heard the women, and some of the boors, declare that they have seen strange sights about the castle,

I have always fancied the report mere nonsense, as I never beheld anything of the kind myself; but there certainly was something odd and unaccountable in the Graff suddenly shutting up the great hall where his brother used always to feast with his retainers; and people did say that he had seen a sight there which had made him dread to enter it again; yet I have passed through the vaults and the hall, many a time since, without ever beholding aught to scare me."

"But take some food, my son, aye, and some wine too,—it will refresh and revive you."

The young man did not object, for, to say truth, he much needed refreshment, the agitation of the mind being always much more exhausting than mere corporeal fatigue. The good priest joined in his supper with moderation, but with evident satisfaction; for, alas that it should be so! yet, nevertheless, it is a fact, that as we advance in life, losing pleasure after pleasure, discovering the delusions of the imagination, which are mixed up with so many

of our joys, and the deceitful character of not a few even of our intellectual delights, there is a strong tendency to repose upon the scanty remnant of mere material gratifications that are left to us by the infirmities of the body. He helped himself and his guest to a glass of the good wine, took another without hesitation, and then insisted upon Ferdinand replenishing his glass, and, encouraging him to do so, bore him company. The young man's spirits rose; the scenes he had just passed through were partially forgotten, and the feelings and impressions which he had felt before he set out, and which, indeed, had brought him thither, once more became predominant. Finishing his meal, he wiped his dagger, and thrust it back into the sheath; and then turning to the monk, he said, "Well, good Father George, I have come at your bidding, and would come further to please you, though I know not well what you want, even if I suspect a little. There was nothing very wrong, though I saw you gave me a frown."

"I never thought there was anything wrong,

my son," replied the priest, gravely. "I saw the lady's hand in yours, it is true. I saw her eyes turned up to yours, with a very beaming look. I saw yours bent down on her, as if your knee would have soon bent also, but I never thought there was anything wrong—of course not."

His tone was perfectly serious; but whether it was conscience, or a knowledge that Father George did not altogether dislike a jest, even upon grave matters, Ferdinand could not help suspecting that his companion spoke ironically. He did not feel quite sure of it, however, and after considering for a moment, he replied, "Well, whatever you may think, Father, it was all very simple. Her horse had fallen with her in the morning; I had not seen her since I had aided to raise her, and I was only asking how she had fared after the accident."

"Nothing more, I doubt not," replied the priest, in the same tone.

"On my life, on my honour!" exclaimed the young man.

"And yet you love her, and she loves you, Ferdinand," rejoined Father George, with a quiet smile. "Deny it not, my boy, for it is a fact."

"Well," answered the youth, with a glowing cheek, "it may be true that I love her, but I love without hope, and I do trust—though perhaps you may not believe me when I say so—I do trust that she does not love me, for I would not, for my right hand, that she should ever know the bitterness of such hopeless passion."

"But why hopeless?" demanded the priest, and paused for an answer.

The young man gazed upon him in surprise, almost amounting to irritation; for deep feeling, except when it is so intense as to lose all sense of external things, will not bear to be trifled with, and he thought the old man was jesting with his passion.

"Why hopeless!" he exclaimed at length. "By difference of station, by difference of wealth, by all the cold respects and icy mandates of the world. Who am I, Father, that I

should dare to lift my eyes to the daughter of a high and mighty lord like this! Noble I may be—you have told me so—but——"

"As noble as herself," replied the priest. "Nay, if blood be all, higher in station. True, fortune has not befriended you, but that same goddess was ever a fickle and capricious dame, and those she raises high one day she sinks low the next, to lift up others in their stead. How many a mighty lord has been pulled from his chair of state, to end his days in dungeons. We have heard of emperors confined to a poor cell, and of princes and heroes begging their bread. The time may come, boy, when upon your arm may hang the fortunes of that lady's house, when to you she may cling for protection and support; and the sun that now shines for her father, may shine for you."

Ferdinand shook his head with a desponding smile, as if it were nigh a mockery to talk of such things. "Whence should those golden days come, Father?" he asked. "Even opportunity, the great touchstone of the heart and mind, the gate of all success, the pathway of

ambition, love, and hope, is closed and barred to me. But yesterday—it seems but yesterday —I was her father's page; and a day earlier, a boy running through the abbey grounds, under your kind care and good instruction—the object of your bounty, of your charity, I do believe——"

"Nay, not so," exclaimed the priest, quickly; "you had your little store of wealth when you fell to my charge, Ferdinand. I have doled it out as I thought best in your nurture and education, but I have still some remaining, which I have invested for you in land near the abbey, and am ready to account for all. But still, even if all were as you say, I see not why you should be in so hopeless a mood; all ladies may be won, all difficulties overcome. There is a chance given to every man in life, his be the fault if he do not seize it."

"The distance is too far, Father," answered the young man. "I have often, when I was a boy, stood and looked at the sun rising through the clouds, and when a bright, broad ray has travelled forth like a pall laid for some em-

peror's tread, stretching from the golden canopy hung over the ascending monarch of the day, and reaching well nigh to my feet, I have almost thought that I could tread upon it, and wend my way to heaven. But such fancies have passed now, Father; such suns no longer shine for me; and in the broad, harsh noonday of manhood, I dream such dreams no more."

"But you dream others no less bright, Ferdinand," replied the priest. "Visions of triumph in the field, and mighty deeds, and great renown, and service to the State, and beauty's smile; fame, happiness, and joy, float even now before your eyes, and those visions may prove true. Did I want proof that such things still are busy in your heart, your very gay and flowery words would show them to me. I am the last to bid you banish them, my son; when well directed and kept within reasonable bounds, they are often the harbingers of great success."

"But who shall direct them for me?" asked his young companion, who had heard encourage-

ment so little expected with evident marks of surprise; "who shall fix the bounds to be called reasonable? To me most of those dreams seem foolish, especially that which is sweetest."

"I will direct, if you will let me," answered the priest. "I will fix the bounds; and to begin, I tell you that the hope you fancy the most visionary is the least so. But leave the matter to me, my dear Ferdinand; follow my counsel, and Adelaide shall be yours, and that speedily."

"Oh, Father!" exclaimed the young man, stretching forth his hand, and grasping that of the priest, "do not—do not, I beseech you, raise in me such hopes, if there be a probability of their failure."

"There is none," replied Father George. "Pursue the course before you boldly; seek her resolutely, though calmly and secretly; tell her of your love; win her confidence, gain whatever ascendency you can over her mind, and leave all the rest to me."

"But, Father, what will be said of my honour, when all is discovered, as it must be?" rejoined the young man. "What torrents of

reproach will fall upon me,—what disgrace, what indignity, will not be heaped upon me! Danger I do not fear, death itself I would encounter, but for the chance of possessing her; but shame—I cannot bear shame, Father."

"Think you, my son," asked the priest, somewhat sternly, "that I would counsel you to anything that is disgraceful? I only advise you to caution and secrecy, because you would meet with opposition in the outset. Have no fear, however, as to the result. I will justify you fully. I have told you that you are her equal in birth, if not at present in wealth; that you have a right to seek her hand; nay, more, that if your heart goes with it, it is expedient both for you and her that you should do so."

"This is all a mystery to me," replied the young man, thoughtfully.

"Ay," answered the priest; "but there are many mysteries in this life, which it is well not to scan. However, if there be blame, your blame be upon me. Still, it is right that you should be able to show that you have not yielded to mere passion; and before you go, I

will give you, under my hand, authority for what you do, for you must neither doubt nor hesitate."

"I do not hesitate, Father," said Ferdinand, with a smile. "Heaven knows that my heart prompts me only too eagerly to follow such pleasant counsel. I will go on, then; but you must be ever ready to advise and assist me; for, remember, I am working in the dark, and may need aid and direction in a thousand difficult circumstances, which neither I nor you foresee."

"Advice shall be ever at your command," answered Father George, "and aid, stronger and better than perhaps you expect; only pursue implicitly the course I point out, and I will be answerable for the end. Now let us talk of other things. How goes the party at the castle—well and cheerfully?"

"Nay," replied the young man, "never very cheerful, good Father. The Count,* you know, is not of a merry disposition."

* I shall adopt the word Count instead of Graff, as the English translation of the title; and shall also follow throughout the same course with regard to other honorary designations, as more convenient.

"No, indeed," said the priest, "he never was so, even from a youth; a dark, stern heart throws its shadow far around, as a bright and benevolent one casts light on everything. He's a very different man from his brother, the last Count, who was cheerfulness itself, full of gay jest and merry happiness, looking lightly and mirthfully upon all indifferent things, yet not without due reverence and feeling for the essential duties of a Catholic Christian and a man. Ah, those were merry days at the old castle, then. The board was always well filled in the great hall; good meat, good wine, gay guests, and pleasant talk—in which the noble lord himself still led others on to enjoy, and seemed to find a pleasure in their pleasure —those were things always to be found where there is now nothing but gloom, and state, and cold service. There were no ghosts then, Ferdinand; no spirits but cheerful ones haunted hall or bower;"—and the old man fell into a fit of thought, seeming to ponder pleasantly upon the times past, though they might contrast

themselves in his mind with the darker aspect of the present.

Ferdinand also remained thoughtful for several minutes, but then rose, saying, "I must be wending my way homeward, Father, though I doubt I shall hardly find it, as I have now no lamp, and those vaults are intricate."

"Stay a while, stay a while," answered Father George, "the storm will not last long, and I will go with you. No spirits will show themselves in my presence, I am sure."

"Oh, I fear them not now," replied Ferdinand; "such hopes as you have given me to-night, Father, will be a spell to lay them."

The old man smiled, well knowing that, notwithstanding the boast, his young companion would not at all object to his company; but he merely replied, "I will take my lantern, youth; for without a light you might lose yourself in the caves, as some have done before you. Look out, and see how the sky appears. The thunder has ceased, I think."

The young man opened the door, and took

a step forth, and then returning, said, "It lightens still, but faintly; and it rains a little. It will soon be over though, I think;" and seating himself again, he spent about half an hour more in conversation with the priest. At the end of that time, the rain having ceased, they set out together for the castle, while the faint flashes of the electric fluid, with which the air was still loaded, gleamed over the sky from time to time, and a distant roar to the westward told that the storm was visiting other lands. It was a toilsome journey up the steep ascent, rendered slippery by the wet, for a man of Father George's years, but he bore up stoutly, and at length they reached the entrance of the crypt below the chapel. Pushing the door open boldly, the old man went in, and advancing some twenty or thirty steps, held up the lantern and looked round. Nothing was to be seen, however, and no sound but the fall of their own footsteps reached the ear of either of the two wanderers, as they pursued their way through the chapel-vaults and the excavations in the rock against which the

building was raised. In the midst of what was called the Serfs' Burying-place, however, close by the spot where the skeleton was chained to the column, Father George paused, and gazed for an instant at the sad sight which it presented. "Ah, poor fellow!" he said, "they bound him there, and strangled him against the pillar, for murdering his master, the last Count, when fighting far away; but to the last he declared, that whatever hand had done it, it was not his act—and I believed him, for he loved the Count well, and the Count loved him. 'T is twenty years ago, and yet see how the bones hold together. Come on, my son; I will see you to the hall door, and then leave you."

Ferdinand, who was not at all partial to a prolonged stay in the vaults, readily followed, and when they reached the little door that led into the hall, the good priest remarked, with a quiet smile, "We have seen no ghosts, my son, nor heard them either."

"True, Father, true," replied the young man; "but those who have heard and seen

must believe. I trust that you may pass back as unmolested as we came."

"I fear not, Ferdinand," answered Father George; "and what is more, you must also shake off all apprehensions; for in order to win her you love, you may have often to tread these same paths."

"If there were a devil in every niche, Father," replied Ferdinand, "I would face them all for her sake."

"Well, well, good-night," said the priest, shaking his head: "love is the religion of a young man, and if it lead him not to wrong, it may lead him to things higher than itself. Keep the key as a treasure, good youth, for it may prove one to you in case of need."

Thus saying, the old man suffered him to light his lamp at the lantern, which was not done without difficulty, as the drops of rain had somewhat wetted the wick; and ere Ferdinand had reached the opposite end of the hall, after leaving the priest, his light was extinguished again, and he had to feel his way to his own chamber, along the dark corridors and stair-

cases of the building. He was wet and tired, but he felt no inclination to sleep, even though darkness continued for more than one hour after he had returned to the castle. There was a brighter light in his heart than that of morning, and in it the new-born hopes sported like gay children at their play. The hour passed away; and having cast off his wet garments, the youth lay down for a few minutes on the bed, but half dressed, thinking—"I will sleep if I can; for it is better they should accuse me of late rising than see from my pillow that it has not been pressed all night. But sleep, like all the pleasant things of life, will not come for much seeking. In vain he shut his eyes; the grey light of dawn found its way between the lashes, sounds were heard in the castle, showing that some of the inferior attendants had risen; and the night watch was relieved under the window of the tower in which he slept. A moment after, however, came another noise; a distant horn sounded, there was a cry of dogs borne from a distance on the air; and with all the quick temerity of aristocratic blood in regard to

the sports of the field, the youth started up on his couch and listened. Again the deep melodious music of hound and horn was heard, and bounding from his bed, he threw open the casement and called to the guard, asking—"Is the Count abroad?"

The answer was in the negative, and throwing on hastily the rest of his dry clothes, the youth rushed out as if to combat an enemy.

CHAPTER III.

The morning rose bright and beautiful after the storm, shining down the valley, glittering on the stream, and illuminating the castle. High on its rock, from the base of which, steep and rugged as it was, stretched forth about a mile of more gradual descent, broken and undulating, thickly covered with trees, and here and there presenting a large mass of fallen stone, looking like the wall of some outwork, decayed by time, and garmented with moss. The whole surface on the summit of the hill was crowned with walls and towers, and such was the commanding situation which they occupied, that in days when the science of warfare, though often practised, was but little known, it might well seem a hopeless

task to attempt to take that castle by any means but famine. On a lower point, or what may be called a step in the rock, appeared a very beautiful and graceful building, the lower part of which displayed strong masonry, and manifold round arches filled up with stone; while in the upper, the lighter architecture of a later period was seen, in thin buttresses and tall pointed windows, pinnacles, and mouldings, and fretwork. Built against the steep side of the cliff below the castle, there seemed at first sight no path to this chapel but from the fortress above, with which it was connected by a few steps, flanked by a low square tower; but to the eye of a traveller, riding or walking along the ridge of hills on the opposite side of the valley, glimpses of a path displayed themselves, winding in and out amongst the wood; and somewhat more than half-way down the hill appeared a small edifice, in the same style of architecture as the upper story of the castle chapel.

On that opposite ridge of hills was another stronghold, or rather what had been so, for

at the time I speak of, it was already in ruins; —and down below, on either hand, swept an ocean of green boughs, covering the declivities of the hills, and leaving a narrow track of little more than half a mile in breadth for verdant meadows, hamlets, and a small but beautiful stream. Following the course of the little river, the eye rested, at about two miles distance, upon the towers and pinnacles of a large building, half concealed in wood; and from the walls thereof, at the hours appointed for the various services of the Roman Catholic Church, might be heard the great bell of the abbey, swinging slow upon the breeze the call to prayer.

Beyond the abbey and the woods that surrounded it, a world of hill and valley was descried, with rocks tossed in wild confusion here and there, taking every different variety of form—now like a giant sitting on the side of a hill, now like the ruined wall of some old fortress, now like a column raised to commemorate some great event, now like the crest of a warrior's helmet, plumed with

feathery trees; they offered to imagination infinite materials for the sport of fancy. All the hollows, too, except those directly facing the east, were filled with mists and shadows, while the tops of the mountains, the higher crags, the old ruins, and the steeple of a distant church, rose as if from the bosom of a dim and gloomy ocean.

Such was the aspect of the scene about an hour after daybreak, and all was yet in the stillness of the early morning; not a sound was heard save the whistle of some one of the peasantry going to his work in the fields, or the lowing of the cattle driven down to the stream to drink, when suddenly the whole valley rang with a wild and peculiar clang. The sound of horns winded loud and clear, the trampling of horses' feet in full career, the loud tongues of dogs, the shouts and calls of huntsmen, echoed along the steep opposite to Ehrenstein, sweeping on fiercely through the woods, apparently from the dilapidated walls of the old stronghold towards the abbey below. On, on went the sounds increasingly, as if

some beast had made its burst from the wood, and was hotly pursued by the hounds; but nothing appeared beyond the green branches. Neither dogs, nor huntsmen, nor horses, were visible to the watcher on the walls of the castle, though many a break in the forest, and an open piece of road, ought to have given him glimpses of the chase, if it took the course which the sounds seemed to indicate.

There were two peasants, however, wending their way from the hamlet near the abbey, towards a vineyard which lay on the other side of the hills, and as their road lay through the wood, they soon heard the noise come rushing on towards them. Both stopped at once, and drew a little out of the direct path, the one saying, "The Count is hunting early in the year;" the other exclaiming, "Come away man—come away. This is not the Count."

The next instant the whole hunt swept by, and the two men drew back in terror; for, instead of the forest green or the gay philimot, the dresses of the hunters were all as black as night, and at their head ro de

man, magnified by their fancy to gigantic stature, clothed from head to heel in arms of the same sombre hue. The men fell down upon their knees, and scarcely dared to raise their eyes; and when one of them did so, he saw the strange leader of that dark array shaking his gauntlet at him with a menacing gesture.

In a few seconds all were gone, and the two peasants stood trembling, while the sounds died away in the distance.

"We shall have war within a twelvemonth," said the one.

"Ay, that we shall," answered the other. "I never thought to see the black huntsman with my own eyes. Let us go and tell the Count; for he will need to prepare. The castle is getting ruinous; and there is neither much wine nor much corn in the neighbourhood."

"No, no; to the abbey—to the abbey, man," rejoined his companion. "It 's there we owe our duty; we are not the Count's men."

"Ay, but the Count may give us a crown for the news," answered the other; "from the

monks we shall have nothing but a *benedicite.*"

"Well, wait a little, wait a little," was the reply. "You know it is dangerous to follow him too close."

"Ay, that 's true," replied the first speaker; "and he shook his fist at me as he passed, for just daring to look up at him. Let us sit down here for a while."

The other agreed, and the two men, seating themselves, continued to converse for about a quarter of an hour. The one, to make himself agreeable, prophesying that his friend, to whom the Black Huntsman had given so menacing a sign of notice, would be forced to go to the wars, and never return alive; the other, though in no little dread, endeavouring to persuade himself and his comrade that no such result would or should ensue.

"I will never be killed in the wars," he said; "for I won't go. I would sooner shave my head, sell all I 've got, and become a serving brother in the abbey."

"Then they 'll pillage the abbey, and you 'll

be killed," rejoined his companion, who was determined, it would seem, that the other should not take any false hope to his bosom. "Hark, here they are coming again!"

Both started up, and were about to plunge into the wood, when, spurring on at fiery speed, and followed by two or three soldiers half-armed, appeared a young cavalier, with his eyes so eagerly bent forward that he did not seem to perceive the two peasants, till one of them exclaimed, "It 's no use following, Master Ferdinand; he's gone far enough now!"

"He!" exclaimed the young man; "who is he, boor—do you know him? Who is it dares to hunt in our lord's lands? If I caught him, he should pay dearly."

"Ah, Master Ferdinand of Altenburg, he is one who would make you pay more likely; but, luckily for you, you can neither cross nor catch him—it was the Black Huntsman and his train. We saw him with our own eyes, and you may go back and tell the Count to prepare for war. Twelve months will not pass from this day before there are armies warring here. Tell

him that old Werner says so; and I have lived years enough to know what I am talking about."

"The Black Huntsman!" exclaimed Ferdinand, holding in his horse, which was struggling forward. "And did you see him, say you—both of you?"

"Ay, both of us," answered the old man. "And he shook his fist at Wettstein here, just because he looked at him a little too sharply."

"The Black Huntsman!" cried Ferdinand, again. "I never before knew any one who saw him. What was he like, Werner?"

"He seemed to me ten foot high!" exclaimed Wettstein, joining in; "and his horse big enough to bear him."

"Nay, nay, not ten foot," cried Werner; "eight he might be, or eight and a half—and all in black from head to heel. I did not see a white spot about him, or his horse either. Did you, Wettstein?"

"Not a freckle as big as a pea," replied his comrade.

"Here's a mighty great horse's footmark, to be sure," said one of the soldiers, who had

dismounted, and was examining the ground. "I think, sir, you had better go back and tell our lord, for he 'll be glad to know of this."

The young man mused without reply for a moment or two, and then turning his horse, rode back towards the castle, halting from time to time to listen for the sounds of the hunt. All had now ceased, however; the valley had returned to its stillness, and nothing but the breeze sighing through the trees was heard, as Ferdinand and his followers rode up the opposite hill.

A number of men were collected under the arched gateway of the castle, and several horses stood ready saddled near, but before them all appeared a tall, dark-looking personage, somewhat past the middle age, but still in full vigour, with a stern and somewhat forbidding countenance. The expression was sharp, but not lofty, morose rather than firm, and as Ferdinand rode up and sprang to the ground, he exclaimed, "Ha, who are they, boy? Or have you turned back from laziness or fear, without having found them?"

Ferdinand's cheek grew red, and he replied, "If I had been fearful or lazy, my lord, I should have waited for orders ere I went to seek them; but when we reached the road leading to Lindenau, the sounds were scarcely to be heard, and we met Werner and Wettstein in the wood, who told us that it was the Black Huntsman."

"Ay, ay," exclaimed the Count, moodily; "doubtless the Black Huntsman. There is never a cry of hounds across the land, but, if you believe the peasants, it is the Black Huntsman. They are in league with the robbers of my deer and boars. The swine-fed rascals have their share, no doubt."

"But, my lord Count," replied one of the soldiers who had accompanied Ferdinand, "this time the men saw him, and he shook his fist at Wettstein for daring to look at him too close. Besides, old Werner is not a man to lie about it."

"Werner and Wettstein!" said the Count, "who are they? We have a hundred of such hogs in the valley."

"They are men of the abbey, my good lord," replied Ferdinand; "and at all events, they were both in the same story, and told it at once. One of our men, too,—it was you, Karl, was it not?—saw the hoof-marks much larger than the common size."

"Ay, that I did," replied the man; "as big as any two in the stable. My lord can see them too, if he doubts it."

"I will," replied the Count, sternly; and without more ado he turned into the castle, leaving the rest to follow to the morning meal.

Contrary to a very common practice of the day, when most of those who were qualified to bear arms were considered fit to sit at the table of their lords, the Count of Ehrenstein usually admitted none but two or three of his chosen followers to take part in the meal at the same board with himself and his daughter. The large hall, of which we have already spoken, had been long disused, and a smaller one, fully large enough, indeed, for the diminished number of retainers which the castle now contained, was divided into two unequal

parts by a step, which raised the table of the lord above that of his vassals. It was to this hall he now took his way, moving slowly onward with a heavy step and eyes fixed upon the ground, till, opening the door, he gazed round it for a moment, and his face lighted up with the first look of pleasure it had displayed that day, as his eyes rested on a group at the farther end of the chamber. From the midst of that group, with a light bounding step, was even then coming forward to meet him, as beautiful a form as was ever beheld, even by a father's eyes; and what father in his heart has never said, when gazing on his child —

"Du nun als ein Engel schön?"

Young she was, very young—in the first early bloom of youth, and wonderfully fair—for no marble that was ever hewn by the most fastidious sculptor's hands, was whiter, clearer, softer, than her skin; and yet there was a glow of health therein, not seeming in the skin itself, but shining through it, like the rosy light of morning pouring into the pale

sky. Her eyes could hardly be called blue, for there was a shade of some other colour in them; but the long black lashes, together with the strong contrast afforded by the fairness of her face, made them look dark, though soft, till one approached her very near. Her dark brown hair, too, full to profusion, looked almost black where it fell upon her neck, notwithstanding the bright golden gleams that shone upon the wavy clusters. Round, yet tapering, every limb was moulded in the most beautiful symmetry, which even the long line of floating garments from the hip to the heel shadowed withoute oncealing; and, as almost always happens, perfection of form produced grace of movement, though that grace is in some degree dependent also upon the spirit within, where it is natural and not acquired. Even in the light, quick, bounding step with which she sprang to meet her father, there was a world of beauty, though it was simply the unstudied impulse of filial affection; and for an instant, as I have said, the very sight of her bright countenance dispelled

the gloom upon her father's face, and brought a momentary gleam of sunshine over it; but the grave, hard look soon returned, and taking her hand in his, he led her on to the upper table, calling to him two of his old ritters or knights, and seated them beside himself and his child.

Ferdinand of Altenburg was about to take his place as usual at the other board, not judging that he stood at all high in the graces of his lord; but after a moment's consideration, the Count beckoned him up, saying, "Sit there, Ferdinand," and then commenced the meal in silence. Adelaide of Ehrenstein looked down, but yet a momentary light shone in her eyes, and a well-pleased smile, before she could check it, played round her lip; and then, as if afraid that the pleasure she felt should be marked by too watchful eyes, the colour glowed warm in her cheek, and even tinged her fair brow. Oh, those traitrous blushes, how often they hang out the flag of surrender, when the garrison would fain hold firm. The young lover

saw the look, and judged it rightly; but no one else seemed to remark it; and while he was thinking what could be the Count's motive in thus honouring him, his lord raised his eyes heavily, saying, "And do you really believe this story of the Wild Huntsman, Ferdinand?"

"Nay, my lord, I know not what to think," replied the youth. "The men seemed so frightened themselves, and spoke so naturally, that I could not doubt that they believed it. Nevertheless, if I could have heard the sounds any more, I should have followed to see this Black Huntsman with my own eyes, but the noise was by that time done."

"Would you not have feared to meet him?" asked the Count, with a smile.

"Not I, sir," answered Ferdinand. "If I find any one hunting on my lord's lands, I will stop him and ask his right, be he black or white. But we could never catch the noise again—and there was another reason, too, that made me think it best to return; the old man, Werner, bade me tell you there would be war within a year."

"And so there will," replied the Count, "if it be truly the Black Huntsman."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Ferdinand; "there will be some chance of honour and distinction then."

The Count's brow grew dark. "Ay, foolish youth," he answered, "and what sums of gold will have to be spent, what fair fields ruined, what crops swept away!"

"And what bloodshed!" said Adelaide, in a low tone. "Oh, my father, I hope it will not be!"

"Bloodshed, that's but a small matter," replied her father, with a grim smile. "It does good to these hot youths to bleed them. Is it not so, Sickendorf?"

"Ay, my lord," answered the old knight to whom he spoke; "and as to the gold and the crops, that's no great matter either. Money must be spent, soldiers must live; and it's a pleasant sight to see a troop of bold fellows in a vineyard swilling the fat boor's grapes. I don't let them burn the houses, unless there's resistance; for there's no good in that, if

the knaves give up their money and their food."

Adelaide was silent, but as she gazed down, with her beautiful eyes full of deep thought, many a dark image of spoliation and cruelty presented itself to fancy as approaching in the train of war. Her father was silent too; for he knew that his somewhat unknightly love of gold was not likely to raise him in the opinion of his followers; but at length he said, "Well, then, we must prepare, at all events, Sickendorf, if this be the Black Huntsman."

"Ay, that we must, my good lord," replied the old man. "He never comes out without being sure of what he's about. I remember when I was in the Odenwalde, with the lord of Erlach, looking at the book in which is written down each time he has gone forth for these two hundred years—"

"And you couldn't read it if you did look," said the other knight, who was at the same table.

"Ay, I know that," replied Sickendorf; "no one better; so I made the sacristan read to

me, and it never failed once, when that Black Horseman went forth, or when the cry of his dogs was heard, that there was war within a twelvemonth. But it is right to be sure that this was he; for it would not do to sit here with the place cooped full of men, fretting ourselves for a year, with the thought of a brave war coming, and then for none to come after all. We should be obliged to have a feud with some friend, just to give the men something to do."

"True, true," answered the Count, with a quick assent; "that would not do at all, Sickendorf. I will go after meat, and inquire more into the affair."

"You had better see the two men, my Lord Count," said Ferdinand. "I will fetch them up from the abbey in an hour, and you can question them yourself."

"No, you will stay where you are, sir," replied his lord, sharply; "I can question them myself without your help. I will see these hoof-marks too. But tell me more; from the sounds I heard as I hurried from my bed,

there must have been a whole host of followers with this Black Huntsman. What said the man?"

In return, Ferdinand gave as good an account as he could of all that had occurred, though he had little to add to what he had told before. He neither exaggerated nor coloured his narrative, but with the vice of youth he indulged in many a figure to express his meaning, as was indeed somewhat customary with him; drawing freely upon imagination for the language, though not for the facts. This mode, however, of telling his tale, did not altogether please his lord, upon whose brow an impatient frown gathered fast. But Adelaide paid his flights of fancy with a smile, and her father's anger was averted by a man coming in hastily from the walls to announce that some one who seemed a messenger was riding up at full speed towards the castle.

"Let him be brought in," replied the Count; and he added, with a laugh, "perhaps this may be news of the Black Huntsman."

Expectation is ever a silent mood; and the

meal continued; even the wine circulated without anything more being said, till at length a man dirty with hard riding through a country still wet with the storm of the preceding night, was brought in, with formal ceremony, by two of the Count's attendants, and led to the table at which he sat. The stranger seemed a simple messenger in the garb of peace, and in his hand he bore one of the large folded letters of the day, inscribed with innumerable titles then and still given to every German nobleman of rank, and sealed with a broad seal of yellow wax.

"Who come you from?" demanded the Count, before he opened the letter which the messenger presented.

"From the high and mighty prince, Count Frederick of Leiningen," replied the man; "who bade me bear this letter to the noble and excellent lord, the Count of Ehrenstein, his old and valued friend, and bring him back an answer speedily."

"Ah! where is the Count?" exclaimed the

lord of Ehrenstein; "when came he back? 'T is many a year since we have met."

"He stopped last night, noble sir, at an abbey some ten miles beyond Zweibrucken, and he will reach that place this day," replied the messenger, answering only one of the Count's questions. "I pray you read the letter and let me have my answer."

The Count cut the silk, and, unfolding the paper, read, while Sickendorf commented in a low tone, with words of admiration, but with something like a sneer upon his lip, at his lord's learning, which enabled him to gather easily the contents of what seemed a somewhat lengthy epistle.

"Ah, this is good news indeed!" exclaimed the Count, at length. "First, that I should see again and embrace my old friend and comrade, Count Frederick;" and he bowed his head, not ungracefully, to the messenger. "Next, that your lord has, after so many years, collected together some of mypoor brother's wealth, which he went to cast away with his life upon a foreign shore. It will come well, Sickendorf,

if the Black Huntsman make his promise of war good.—You, sir, take some refreshment, while I go to write the safe-conduct which your lord requires. Then you shall spur on, as hastily as may be; for, if not, I shall overtake you on the road. Tell the mighty Count, that I will not answer his letter till I 've held my old friend in my arms, and that he shall see me at once at Zweibrucken ere two hours past noon." Thus saying, he rose and left the hall, and while Sickendorf and the other knight made the messenger sit down at the lower table, furnished him with food and wine, and questioned him eagerly as to Count Frederick's journey, and when he had returned from eastern lands, Ferdinand of Altenburg leaned across the table, and spoke a few low words to Adelaide of Ehrenstein, which made the colour come and go in her cheek, as if some strong emotions were busy in her heart. Whatever he said, indeed, was very brief, for he feared to draw the notice of those around upon them both; and in a moment after he had ceased, the Count returned, with a paper in his hand.

The messenger would not wait to finish his meal, but retired from the hall, remounted his horse, and spurred on his way back.

As soon as he was gone, the tables were cleared, and orders given for instant preparation, that the Count might set out to meet his friend, with all the state and display that befitted his station. Before he went, he whispered to Sickendorf to bring up during his absence, all the vassals from the neighbouring estates, to swell the number of retainers in the castle, against the following day; to sweep the country round of its poultry, eggs, and fruit—a pleasant mark of paternal affection which the peasantry of that day not unfrequently received from their lords; and to prepare everything for one of those scenes of festivity which occasionally chequered the monotony of feudal life in peaceful times.

Ferdinand of Altenburg stood ready to accompany his lord, with his horse saddled, and his gayest garment displayed, never doubting for a moment that he was to form one of the train. No sooner, however, had

the Count done speaking to the old knight, than he turned towards the youth, saying, sharply, "Did I not tell you that you were not to go? You will stay and guard the castle while Sickendorf is absent, and go no farther from it, till I return, than the stream on one side, or the hamlet on the other."

The tone was haughty and imperious; and Ferdinand felt his heart burn, but he merely bowed, and took a step back; the Count, fancying that he had mortified him by leaving him behind, and feeling that sort of bitter pleasure which harsh men find in giving pain, though, in truth, if he had sought to consult the youth's most anxious wishes, he would have acted just as he did act. What was to Ferdinand, Count Frederick of Leiningen? What cared he for the meeting of two haughty lords? In the castle of Ehrenstein remained Adelaide; and where she was, even though he might not see her, there was festival for him.

¶ Adelaide had left the hall while the preparations for her father's journey were being made, and was not present when he departed.

Old Sickendorf bustled about for nearly half an hour after the Count was gone, choosing out men, from those left in the castle, to accompany him upon what was neither more nor less than a marauding expedition; and he then set out with right good will to perform a part of his duty which he loved the best. Ferdinand of Altenburg watched from the battlements of one of the towers the train of his lord, as it crossed the valley and mounted the opposite hill, and then fixing his eyes on the spot where the road, emerging from the wood again, wound on through the distant country, continued to gaze till the last horseman disappeared on the road to Zweibrucken. He then paced up and down till Sickendorf and his people also were gone, and then paused, leaning thoughtfully against the wall, as if considering what was next to be done.

The world is full of thin partitions, moral and physical, so slight, so feeble in appearance, that one would think they would fall with a touch, but often more strong than doors of brass or iron; and like the airy limits of two

hostile countries, they are full of dangers to those who pass them. There, in the same dwelling, with nought between him and her but a door that would at once yield to his hand, was she whom he loved. His heart beat to go and join her; hers he fondly hoped would flutter gladly to have him near; but yet he dared not go. Surrounded by her women, as he believed she was, he knew that the risk of such a step would be great to all his future hopes; and yet he asked himself again and again, if he must lose so bright an opportunity. It might never return; all the manifold chances of human fate presented themselves to his mind, and he would have been less than a lover, if he had not resolved to find some means of drawing sweet advantage from the golden present. How? was the only question; and after long thought, he descended slowly by the steps that led to the battlements beneath the lady's window, and there seating himself, with his eyes turned over the distant country, as if simply whiling away an idle hour, he sat and sang:—

SONG.

Wander with me, loved one, loved one,
Wander with me where none can see;
Through the wood,
By the flood,
Under the greenwood tree.

Wander with me, loved one, loved one,
Wander with me where none can hear;
Where none is nigh,
But the birds that fly,
And the timid and silent deer.

Wander with me, loved one, loved one,
Wander with me where none can mark;
Where the leaves green,
Our love shall screen,
In their bower 'twixt light and dark.

Wander with me, loved one, loved one,
And a tale to thee I 'll tell,
Which, if thy heart
With mine takes part,
Shall please thine ear right well.

As he ended, the casement, which was partly open, was drawn fully back, and the head of a gay, light-hearted girl, one of Adelaide's

attendants, was thrust forth with a laughing countenance, exclaiming, "Get ye gone, you vile singer! no one can rest in peace for your harsh voice. Methought it was a raven or a daw cawing on the battlements, and our lady cannot read her missal for hearing thee talk of thy 'loved one, loved one.'"

"Nay, let him alone," said Adelaide, advancing to the window; "I love music, Bertha; 't is that thou canst not sing a note thyself that makes thee jealous. Sing on, if thou wilt, Ferdinand; I would listen to you with right good will, but that I promised Father George to come down to the shrine to-day; and I must read before I go."

She said no more, and did not even look at him while she spoke, but the gay girl Bertha's eyes twinkled with an arch smile upon her lips, as if she guessed more than either the lady or her lover suspected. Ferdinand replied little, but slowly moved away: and in about ten minutes after he might be seen going forth from the castle gates, and taking the road which led away in a different direction from the chapel in the wood.

The reader need not be told that in every portion of life, in all life's doings, in everything moral and physical, there are circuitous paths; nor that nine times out of ten, when a man seems to be doing one thing, he is doing another. It is a sad truth, a bitter dark reality; so much so, indeed, that those who have watched man's ways most closely, will best understand the force and beauty of the words which the inspired writer uses,—"a man without a shadow of turning"—to express all that we should be, and are not. However, in that deep wood that cloaked the side of the hills, there were nearly as many crooked paths and tortuous roads as in human life. Ferdinand took his path to the north, the chapel lay to the south. The watchman saw him go, and thought no more of it; but the keen eye of the gay girl Bertha marked him also, and she smiled. Some half hour after, when her young mistress went out alone, and bent her steps towards the chapel, Bertha laughed.

CHAPTER IV.

About an hour and a half after Ferdinand's song had ceased, the door of the chapel, which had been closed, opened, and two figures came forth under the green shadow of the forest leaves. The first was that of Adelaide of Ehrenstein, and her face bore tokens of recent agitation. By her side appeared good Father George, with his head uncovered, and no staff in his hand. He was speaking with the lady, earnestly but gently, and he still continued to walk on with her for some yards up the hill. More than once, as they went, Adelaide's eyes were turned to either side of the path, as if she feared or expected some interruption, and though she said not a word to indicate what was passing in her heart, the good Father

marked the sort of anxiety she seemed to feel, and at length paused, saying, "Well, my child, I will go with you no farther. You will be quite safe on your way back; and if you attend to my voice, and follow my counsel, you might be happy yourself, and save others worlds of pain."

He did not pause for a reply, but turned, and re-entered the chapel, leaving Adelaide to pursue her way through the wood, with almost every path of which she had been familiar from infancy. Nevertheless, as she went, she still continued to look timidly round. She did not go far alone, however, for just as she passed the first turning, which hid the chapel from the eye, there was a step near, and Ferdinand was by her side.

"Oh, Ferdinand!" she said, "I am terrified. What is it you want to say? If any one were to find me here with you alone, what would they think?—and my father, if he heard it, it would bring destruction on your head too."

"Fear not, fear not," replied her lover; "turn into this path with me, dear Adelaide, it

will bring you as quickly to the castle as the other, and we can speak there more freely."

His fair companion hesitated; but taking her hand in his, he led her gently forward, though not without a glowing cheek and eyes cast down. It was a small footway, which horses could not travel, and wound with many a turn up to the top of the high hill on which the castle stood. The short green mountain turf, the broken masses of rock here and there, the straggling boughs reaching across, and the wild flowers springing uncrushed, even in the midst of the path, showed that it was trodden by no very frequent feet. The green branches crossing on high shaded it from the sun; except when, about the hour of noon, his searching rays poured down, slept on a mossy bank here and there, or chequered the grass with dancing light and shade. The dove and the wood-pigeon murmured overhead, the breeze sighed faintly through the leaves, and the nightingale—still in song—trilled his rich notes upon many a bough above. There was a tenderness and yet

a freshness in the air; there was a calming and softening light upon the way; there was a loveliness and a promise, and a wooing gentleness in the whole scene, that fitted it well for lovers and for love. The voice of nature seemed counselling affection; the aspect of all things harmonized with the passion in each of those two young hearts; and though Ferdinand was not skilled enough in the mystery of association to have chosen that scene as one likely to melt and touch the heart he sought to make his own, yet he could not have found one on the whole earth better adapted for the tale he had to tell. He lost no time ere he told it; and though his words were ardent—ay, and even impassioned—yet there was a gentleness in his whole tone, a soft and deprecating look upon his countenance, a tenderness as well as a warmth in all he said, which prevented the young and timid woman's heart from feeling much of that sort of apprehension with which it often shrinks from the first touch of love. Brought up with him almost from her childhood, unlearned in the ways of the world,

left nearly to solitude since her mother's death, with no other companion in her girlhood but him who walked beside her, and loving him with a love that had still increased, Adelaide felt it less strange to listen to such words from him, than she would have done with any other human being. She felt it less difficult, too, to reply to him, timidly, yet frankly, not concealing what she felt, even when she did not speak it.

He told her how long he had loved,—for a few short years, or even months, were long in their short lives. He told her how the affection of the boy had grown into the passion of the man; how the fraternal tenderness of early life had warmed into the ardent affection of maturity. He told her, too, how hope had been first illumined in his heart by light that seemed to shine forth from hers; how words that she had spoken without feeling their full import, had bid him not despair; how smiles from her lips, and rays from her eyes, had nourished and expanded the flower of love in his bosom. He went on to relate how he had

trembled, and feared, and doubted, and hesitated, when he first became conscious of the full strength of all his sensations; how he had put a guard upon himself; how he had refrained from seeing her alone; how he had resisted many a temptation; but how the power of the passion within had overcome all prudent care, and had made him more than once speak words of tenderness, in spite of every effort to restrain them. With the rich, wild imagery of a warm and glowing imagination, and of a heart full of eager affection, he depicted the pangs he had endured, the struggles he had undergone, the cares and anxieties which had been his companions during the day, the bitter and despairing thoughts which had haunted him through the night. But at length he explained how hope had dawned upon him; how assurance and comfort had been given him the night before; and how one, upon whom they could both depend, had encouraged him to persevere, and held out mysterious hopes of fortune and success.

He did not, indeed, pursue his tale evenly to the close; for more than once his fair companion murmured a few words of compassion for what he had suffered, of anxiety for his safety, of doubt regarding the future; all of which were very sweet, for all showed him too happily, too brightly, that he was loved in return; and when at length he referred to his conversation with the priest, and to the expectations which had been held out, she looked eagerly up in his face, replying without disguise, "So he said to me, Ferdinand. He spoke of strange and mysterious things; of my fate and that of my house being linked to yours by an unseen tie; which, if it were broken, would bring ruin on us all. I could not understand him. I doubted, for I could scarcely believe such happy tidings true."

She paused and coloured, as soon as the words were spoken; and blushed more deeply still when he asked, "Then they were happy, dear Adelaide?"

"You do not doubt it," she murmured, after a moment's silence. "But at all events," she

continued—suddenly turning from the question —"my mother told me, the very last time she held me in her arms, to trust to what he might say; and now he bids me give myself to you, without fear or doubt. I know not what to think."

"Think that he directs you right, dear Adelaide," replied her lover eagerly; "and oh! follow his guidance, and the guidance of your own heart."

She was silent for some minutes, walking on by his side, till at length he asked, "Will you not promise, Adelaide, will you not promise to be mine?"

"How can I—how dare I?" she answered. "Without my father's will, what good were my promise, Ferdinand?"

"All, everything to me," answered her lover; "for that promise once given you would not break it, dear one. Who can tell what your father may design? Who can tell that he may not some day seek to drive you to a marriage with one you hate; or, at best, can never love? But that promise once given to

me, would be strength to you, my beloved, as well as comfort and assurance to myself. It would be the rainbow of my life; a pledge that there would be no more destruction of all hopes. Oh! dear girl, do not refuse me; give me back comfort and joy; give me back light and sunshine; give me that security against all I dread; give me that support in danger, that consolation in affliction, that object of endeavour and of hope. Were it but the voice of a lover, Adelaide, you might well hesitate, you might well doubt; but one who has no passion to serve, who is calmer, alas! than I can be; who knows more than we know, and judges more wisely than we can judge—one for whom your dear mother bespoke your confidence; one whom you promised her to trust and to rely on—he urges you as strongly even as I do, and bids you follow the course in which love would lead, not for my sake alone, but for your own also."

They had reached a spot, by this time, where the wood fell back a little from the path on one side, and a low, rocky bank appeared on

the other, crowned with old beeches. A spring of bright, clear water welled from the stone, filling a basin that some careful hand had carved below; while above, in a little niche, was placed a figure of the Virgin, with the infant Saviour in her arms; and Ferdinand, extending his hand towards the well, added earnestly, "Here I, at least, Adelaide, saw that dear lady for the last time; here she taught us to kneel down and pray together, not many days before she laid that injunction upon you. And now, dear Adelaide, now you will not refuse me—now you will follow the counsel to which she pointed—and promise to be mine."

There was love in her heart, there was a voice in her own bosom spoke more eloquently than his; she wavered—she yielded. He saw the colour come and go; he saw the bright eyes full of tears; he saw the lip quiver, and he cried, "Oh! promise, promise, Adelaide!"

"Well, I do," she murmured; and at the same instant a voice near seemed to say, "Promised, promised!"

Both started and looked round, but nothing was to be seen. The clear light streamed through the trees on the top of the bank, suffering the eye to see for some way between their trunks; the open space behind was considerable, and no place of concealment appeared to be near.

"It was but the echo, dearest," said Ferdinand; and pronouncing a word or two sharply, there was a slight return of the sound. Adelaide was not satisfied, however, and laying her hand upon his arm, she said in a low tone, "Come away, come away. Oh, Heaven! if any one should have discovered us!"

"No fear, no fear, dearest," replied her lover, walking on by her side. "But to guard against discovery for the future, Adelaide, we must devise some means of communication. Is there any one near you, whom you can trust, my beloved?"

"No one but Bertha," answered the lady: "I can trust her, I am sure, for she is good and true; but yet I do not think I could ever make

up my mind to speak to her on the subject first."

Ferdinand mused for a moment or two, with a smile upon his lips; and then replied, "I almost suspect, Adelaide, that Bertha will not require much information. If I might judge by her look to-day, she's already aware of more than you suspect."

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Adelaide, "do not say so. If she is, my conduct must have been very imprudent."

"Her eye may have been very keen," replied her companion; "but if you think you can trust her, I will speak to her upon the subject myself—cautiously and carefully, you know, dear one, so as not to tell her more than is necessary at once; but, indeed, I can foresee many circumstances in which we shall have absolute need of some one to aid us—of some one who can give tidings of each to the other, when all opportunity of private intercourse may be denied us."

"You must judge, Ferdinand, you must judge," answered Adelaide; "but, indeed, I

fear I have done wrong already, and tremble to look forward to the coming time. And now, leave me, dear Ferdinand. We are near the castle, and you ought not to go with me further. Every step agitates and terrifies me, and I would fain seek my own chamber, and think."

Still Ferdinand lingered, however, for some time longer; still he detained his fair companion; nor would he part with her till love's first caress was given, and the bond between them sealed upon her lips. But at length Adelaide withdrew her hand, half smiling, half chiding, and hurried away, leaving him to follow some time after. When she reached the castle, she passed the room where she had before been sitting, catching with a glowing cheek a gay, arch look that Bertha directed towards her; and entering her bed-room, cast herself upon her knees and prayed, while tears of agitation and alarm, both at her own sensations, and at what she had promised, rolled over the dark lashes of her eyes, and trickled down her cheek. Young love is ever

timid; but in her case there were other feelings which moved her strongly and painfully. She was not satisfied with her own conduct; she feared she had done wrong; and for that one day she acted the part of a severe censor on herself. True, her father's demeanour little invited confidence; true, he was often harsh and severe, even to her; true, from him she could expect no consideration for her wishes or for her feelings; but yet he was her father, the one whom she was bound to love and to obey; and her own heart would not altogether acquit her, even though love pleaded eloquently on her behalf. I have said that she thus felt and suffered for that one day; for, as will be seen hereafter, a strange and sudden change came over her, and with no apparent reason, she soon gave herself up unboundedly to the full influence of her attachment. The human heart is a strange thing; but very often, for visible effects which seem unaccountable, there are secret causes sufficient for all. In our dealings with the world, and with each of our fellow-men, we are

too often unjust, not so much from judging wrongly, as from judging at all. "Man can but judge from what he knows," is the common cry of those who find themselves fearfully wrong when all is explained; but the question which each should ask himself is, "Am I called upon to judge at all?" and too often the reply would be, "Judge not, and thou shalt not be judged; condemn not, and thou shalt not be condemned." Sufficient, surely, is the awful responsibility of judging, when duty or self-defence forces it upon us; how terrible, then, the weight when we undertake to decide unnecessarily upon the conduct of others, without seeing the circumstances, without hearing the evidence, without knowing the motives,—and yet we do it every day, and every hour, in our deeds, in our words, and in our thoughts, lacking that true charity of the heart that thinketh no evil. But man has become a beast of prey: the laws prevent him from tearing his fellows with his teeth, and the human tiger preys upon them in his thoughts.

CHAPTER V.

THERE are men who rise from a low station to a throne; and it certainly must be a grand and triumphant sensation which they experience when first they sit in the seat of sovereignty, and feel their brows pressed by the golden circlet of command, with the great objects of ambition all attained, the struggle up the steep ascent to power accomplished, and the end reached for which they have fought, and laboured, and watched through many a weary day and night. But the exultation of that moment, great as it may be, is nothing to that which fills the heart of youth in the first moment of successful love. The new-throned usurper must be well-nigh weary of repeated triumphs; for the step to the throne

is but the last of many a fatiguing footfall in the path of ambition. He, too, must foresee innumerable dangers and difficulties round; for the experience of the past must teach him that in his race there is no goal, that the prize is never really won, that he may have distanced all others, but that he must still run on. Not so with the lover in the early hours of his success; his is the first step in the course of joy, and the brightest, because the first. Fresh from all the dreams of youth, it is to him the sweetest of realities; unwearied with the bitter task of experience, he has the capability of enjoyment as well as the expectation of repose. The brightness of the present spreads a veil of misty light over all that is threatening in the future; and the well of sweet waters in the heart seems inexhaustible.

With what a different step Ferdinand of Altenburg trod the halls of the castle on his return; with what a different view he looked on all things round him! The gloomy towers, the shadowy chambers, the long, cheerless corridors, seemed full of light; and there was

a gay and laughing spirit in his heart which had not been there since love first became its tenant. He could have jested, he could have sported like a child; but, alas! there was no one to jest or sport with, for not more than five or six men were left in the castle after the train of the Count and the little band of Sickendorf had departed. Adelaide, too, remained in her own apartments, whither he dared not venture; and none of the two or three girls who attended upon her, and who, with an elderly dame, whose principal function appeared to be to quarrel with the chief butler, formed all the female inmates of Ehrenstein, ventured forth for nearly two hours after his return. Bertha, indeed, looked at him once, as he paced the battlements below the windows of the room in which she sat, but maliciously kept the casement closed, suspecting, perhaps, that he had had enough enjoyment for one day. Anxious to speak with her, and to carry out his plan for making her the means of communicating with her mistress, Ferdinand, as he turned back again, ventured to make her a

sign to join him; but Bertha took no notice, and plied her busy hands on the embroidery frame where she sat, without seeming even to see him.

The poor lover's first happy day promised but a dull passing. Those were not days of many books; and perhaps, in the whole extent of the castle, not more than four or five were to be found. But Ferdinand could not have read, even had they been to be procured, for his whole thoughts were in that busy and excited state, in which it was impossible to fix his mind with attention upon anything but his own fate and projects. He went the whole round of the castle; then he saw that everything was in order; he spoke to the men who were in the execution of their daily duties; and often as he went, he fell into a fit of thought, where fancy rapt him far away, wandering in bright sunny lands, side by side with her he loved. At length, returning to the corridor above, through which he knew that both Adelaide and Bertha must pass, if either came forth from the ladies' apartments,

he stationed himself at one of the windows, and continued to gaze out over the wide extent of forest, and hill, and dale, which the prospect presented. All was silent and quiet. A dreamy stillness hung over the whole place; the sunshine itself seemed to sleep quietly over the motionless masses of the trees, and never was there an hour or a scene in which a young lover might indulge the glittering visions of imagination, with less to distract or interrupt his thoughts.

The last four-and-twenty hours had been busy ones in Ferdinand's life—busy in emotions, if not in action; and they had been varied too by many a change of sensation, by much despondency, by awe and by fear, and by hope and joy. But if the truth must be told, it was only on the hope and joy that his mind dwelt. The strange and fearful scenes through which he had passed the night before were forgotten, or at least not thought of; the sorrows that were past gave but a sort of shadowy relief to the bright aspect of the present; difficulties, impediments, dangers, were unheeded or unseen.

For not more than half an hour, however, was he suffered thus to dream; for, at the end of that time, the door at which he had looked up as he passed on the preceding night was opened and closed; and turning quickly round he saw Bertha gliding down the corridor towards the top of the staircase. She laid her finger on her lips as she passed him; and, without speaking, he followed where she led.

The gay girl took her way to the battlements on the shady side of the castle, to which few of the rooms of the building were turned; there she paused, and looked gaily at Ferdinand, with her dark eyes sparkling, and her pretty little lip curling with fun and malice. "Impudent young man," she said, as he joined her, "how can you do such things? first singing a love song under my window, and then making me a sign to come and join you. I am a great deal too good-natured, and too tender thus to indulge you. If our lady were to find out that we were lovers, she would tell her father

and then we should soon both be sent out of the castle."

She spoke as gravely as she could; and though her gay look might give some indication of what was passing within, yet Bertha's eyes were always such merry ones, that Ferdinand felt not a little embarrassed how to answer what perhaps might be a jest, but which might yet be serious also. She enjoyed his perplexity for a moment or two, and then asked in a sharp tone, "Well, sir, why don't you speak if you have anything to say? If you don't, I must give you something to talk about. Tell me, sir, what is it has made my mistress so sad since she went out and met you in the wood?"

"Sad is she?" exclaimed Ferdinand, alarmed; "I know nought that should make her sad."

"Well, she is," replied Bertha; "for she 's shut up in her own room, and Theresa compassionately looked through the keyhole, and told us she was weeping."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Ferdinand,

still hesitating whether he should acknowledge that he had met Adelaide or not. "Nothing I have ever done could give her pain."

"Well, don't look so terrified, sir lover," answered Bertha; "there are a thousand other things beside pain that make women weep; sometimes joy, sometimes fright; and perhaps it is the last in this case."

"But why should she fear?" asked Ferdinand.

"Nay, that you know best," replied Bertha. "You've neither of you thought fit to tell me anything about it; but you had a great deal better; for, if you don't, depend upon it you'll get yourselves into all manner of difficulties and dangers. You are both of you as imprudent and as ignorant of such matters as if you were twelve years old; and I should not wonder if you were to have yourself strangled for making love to your lord's daughter, and to get her either shut up in a convent, or married in haste to some fierce old baron, who may maltreat her, as

my good and noble lord, the Count, used his poor wife."

"Nay, now you are trying to tease me, pretty Bertha," replied Ferdinand of Altenburg. "As I see you know a great deal, I may as well tell you all; and I will, if you can be serious; but if you go on in jest with me, I will jest with you, and may find means to tease you too."

"Nay, I am not jesting at all," answered Bertha, more gravely; "all I have said is true enough: and I can tell you I have been in a great fright for you both for some time. For during the last month I have been terrified every day lest others should see what was plain enough to my eyes. Do you consider what it is you are doing, and what sort of a man our lord is—that he would no more hesitate to put you to death in the castle-ditch than to eat his breakfast?"

"He dare not," answered Ferdinand, boldly. "He may do that with a serf or a vassal, perhaps; but I am neither the one nor the other, and as noble as he is."

All women love daring, and the youth's answer pleased his companion well; yet she could not help jesting him a little upon what she called his pride. "Oh, yes, you 're a gentleman born!" she said; "you have made us all know that. But now, Ferdinand, talk a little reason, and don't pretend to say what our lord dare do, or dare not do. He dare do many a thing, and has before now, which perhaps neither I nor you dream of. But in a word, young gentleman—for I must not stop long—I have seen for some time all that is going on here, and would have given a great deal to stop it, but I did not know how; and now it is too late. The only thing to be thought of at present is, what is to come of all this? On my life! my knees shake when I think of it; and I am not apt to be afraid of a little adventure either. What is it that you two propose to do?"

To say the truth, this was a question for which Ferdinand was not at all prepared with an answer. He had laid out, indeed, no distinct plan of action. Youth and love are strange reliers upon circumstances, and

he replied simply, "To go on loving, I suppose."

"Oh, that plan will never do," answered Bertha, laughing. "You can't stop there. In the first place, you would neither of you be content to go on loving like a couple of turtles in two separate cages all your lives; and besides, things would soon happen to drive you out of such idleness of love. Any day of the week, my lord may think fit to marry his daughter; and what would she and you do then? I must think of some plan for you, poor things; for I see you are not fit to devise any for yourselves."

"The only plan, my pretty Bertha, to be followed at present," answered Ferdinand, after a moment's thought, "is for you to befriend us, and give us help as far as you can, in whatever circumstances may occur; to let me know everything that happens to your lady that I do not see; and I will take care that you shall know everything that occurs to me, in order that it may be communicated to her. I am sure it is your wish to serve

her, Bertha; she loves you dearly, and has such confidence in you that she told me I might confide in you implicitly."

"I would serve her with my heart's blood," replied the girl, warmly; "though Heaven forbid that I should have to do so," she added, laughing; "for I would a great deal rather have that heart's blood where it is, and see her happy too, poor girl. But, heigho! I don't know how that 's to be done, and if I am to be the messenger between you, Master Ferdinand, there will be nothing for it but for you to make love to me; or, at least, to get the people of the castle to think you are so doing."

"Oh, that won't be a very difficult task, Bertha," replied the young man, with a gallant look. "And all we can do is to watch events, and to take advantage of them as they arise—at least till we have further counsel from Father George as to how we ought to act."

"Oh, is Father George in the secret?" cried Bertha, clapping her hands joyfully; "then there is hope. The lord of the abbey against

the lord of the castle will always beat in the end. But what says the good Father?"

"He says everything to encourage us," answered Ferdinand, "and, unlike you, fair Bertha, nothing to discourage."

"He knows more than I do," replied Bertha, "more than any of us; and he has some reason, I'll warrant. I wish to Heaven I could see him; but I dare not go down so far, for fear I should be missed. He was with our poor lady in her last hours, and doubtless could tell a tale if he would—well, well, men are strange creatures. I wonder women are such fools as to make themselves their slaves —I'll never marry—not I; for I never yet saw the man that was not as soft as a dormouse while he was courting, and as hard as a hyena when he was married. But there comes old Sickendorf riding up through the wood—I must away, for he's the greatest old tell-tale in the world, with the gossiping tongue of a grandmother, the spite of a monkey, and the heart of a wolf."

"Stay, stay, Bertha," cried the young gen-

tleman. "If we are to seem lovers, you know, it is as well that the old man should see us; and if he catches sight of you walking here with me, without perceiving who it is distinctly, he may fancy it is Adelaide, and make mischief there."

"Ah, you treacherous boy!" cried the gay girl, "that is a true specimen of all men. To shield yourself and your love of the hour you would have all the risk and the blame fall upon me, though Heaven knows I am hazarding enough to serve you. The more faith and truth we poor things have, the more ready are you to sacrifice us. It seems quite natural and right, does it not, that I should, just as an honour and a pleasure, fall into blame with my lord, and seem your light of love to blind him to your mad passion for his daughter."

"But you yourself proposed, I should make the people think that you, Bertha, are the object I am seeking," replied Ferdinand, "and now when I propose to follow that very plan you accuse me of ingratitude, wavering to and fro like an aspen leaf."

"Am I not a woman?" cried Bertha, laughing; "have I not a right to waver? If you are to make love to me, I tell you, I will change fifty times a day; when I pout, you shall call my lips budding roses; when I smile, you shall call my brow, heaven; when I cry, you shall say my eyes are like the April sky. Now, I am not in the humour for being made love to, so I have more than a mind to run away and leave you as a morsel for old Sickendorf's grinders — at least, those he has left."

"Nay, nay, dear Bertha," cried Ferdinand, pressing to her side as he saw the horsemen coming near; "if not for mine, for your sweet mistress's sake, play out the part you have undertaken."

"The mystery must not be a long one, then, Master Ferdinand," answered Bertha; "and, for modesty, keep a little farther off, for although I do not very much mind that people should say I listened to a love story—there being no great harm in that—I would rather they did not think it too warm a one, for

women have a character to lose, though men have none worth keeping."

"But then, dear Bertha, it is understood that you will befriend us," said her companion, "and will keep our secret, and give us all sorts of information and advice."

"Aye, aye," answered Bertha, "I must risk putting my hand into the bee-hive and being stung to death, to get you to the honey. I am older than either of you, and ought to know better, but you are two such poor imprudent things, that if I did not help you, one would die of a broken heart, and the other of a broken neck, very soon, so I must even run the risk. But I will have some talk with Father George, very soon, for if he does not give me some assurance and comfort, I shall dream of nothing but being strangled every night. Here they come, here they come; Sickendorf and his gang. Heaven and earth! what have they got all those horses loaded with? they must have been plundering Neustadt. Now, cannot you make me a fine speech, Master Ferdinand, swearing love and

eternal constancy, such as you men tickle poor girls' ears with, just to let old Sickendorf see you in the act of protestation?"

"I would give you a kiss, pretty Bertha," replied Ferdinand, gaily, "and that would do better, only you told me not to come near."

"Oh, that would be too close, a great deal," answered Bertha, laughing. "There, he sees us—hark! he is calling out to us—I will run away as if in a fright, and let him see my face as I go."

She did as she proposed, and in a moment after the old knight came riding along under the battlements calling up to Ferdinand with a loud laugh, "Ha, ha, you young dog, that's what you staid at home for, to chat with pretty Bertha on the walls!"

"No great harm in that, Sickendorf," replied Ferdinand, leaning over to speak to him. "I dare say you have done such a thing before now, yourself; and will do it again many a time. Both she and I like a walk in the free air, better than being stifled in the

castle all day long. And why shouldn't we take it together?"

"If that were all, why didn't you go on the side, where folks could see you?" replied the old man, still merry. "No, no, youngster, I am too old a campaigner for that. However, it's no business of mine. We've made a glorious forage. The rogues did not expect to be called upon in such a hurry, so that all the capons were strutting before the door; aye, and geese too. How many geese have we got, Martin?"

"Nineteen, sir," answered the man; and the old knight was riding on, when Ferdinand called after him, laughing, "Why, that's the number of your troop, Sickendorf!"

The other shook his fist at him good-humouredly enough; for his heart was expanded by the success of his expedition, and to say the truth, Bertha had done him but scanty justice. He was a thorough old German knight of the times—a character which had generally more or less of the reiter in it—as ignorant as a boor of everything but war,

brave as a lion, superstitious in a high degree, bloody when enraged or opposed, rapacious as any beast of prey, and holding fast by the old maxim, that anything is justifiable in love or war. Far from thinking the worse, therefore, of Ferdinand, if he had made love to all Adelaide's maids together, he would only have considered it a very laudable method of employing his idle hours, and would never have thought of reporting it to the Count as a matter of blame. He looked upon deceiving a poor girl with tales of love, or beating a boor nearly to death who resisted any unjust demand, as one of the privileges of a soldier and a gentleman, which it was not only just but expedient to exercise from time to time, to keep such rights from falling into desuetude; and after he entered the castle, turning his thoughts to other affairs, he gave no more attention to the proceedings of Bertha and Ferdinand, only jesting the young man for a moment upon his love-making; and declaring that he had shown bad taste, for that Theresa was by far the prettier girl of the two.

"That 's because you are as black yourself as one of the andirons," answered Ferdinand, "and therefore you think every fair-faced girl with flaxen hair a perfect beauty. I dare say you 've said sweet things enough to Theresa, and, therefore, I wouldn't for the world try to spoil your game, if you won't spoil mine."

"Pooh, nonsense; I 've given up love these twenty years," said Sickendorf, "but I won't meddle with your affairs. I wouldn't mar a nice little plot of love for half the lands of Ehrenstein—so go on your own way, I 'll not interfere."

"Upon your honour?" asked Ferdinand.

"Upon my knighthood," replied the old man. "So long as you do your duty as a soldier, I 'll not meddle with your love affairs. But on my life, I 'm mighty hungry, for I 've had nothing but a flagon of wine since I went, and I can never wait till supper-time."

"Do not be afraid," answered Ferdinand, "I made the cook put by for you at dinner, the whole of a roast chine of roebuck, though Metzler and Herman looked at it as if their

very eyes would have eaten it. I knew you would come home like a wolf."

"That's a good boy, that's a good boy," answered the old knight, "I won't forget you for that. You shall have the skinning of a fat village some day all to yourself; but I'll go and get the *reh-braten*, for I could eat my fingers." And away he went, to satisfy his appetite, which was at all times one of the best.

CHAPTER VI.

An hour or two went by, and it was drawing towards night, when Sickendorf, after having appeased the cravings of hunger, was walking up and down the ordinary hall, for want of anything else to do. Indeed, the piping time of peace to a soldier of his stamp was a very dull period, especially at that season of the year, when many of the sports of the field are forbidden; and any little incident that broke the monotony of the castle life was a great relief. There was nobody in the hall but himself; and he was cursing the slow flight of time, and thinking the Count very long upon the road home, when the lifting of the door latch made him turn his head, and he instantly

exclaimed, with a hoarse laugh, "Ha! who are you looking for, Mrs. Bertha? Ferdinand is not here."

"I was looking for you, sir," answered Bertha, with perfect composure, at the same time walking up to him. "I do not think my lady is at all well," she continued, "she has been moping by herself all day, and says her head aches."

"Ah! that's bad, that's bad," answered Sickendorf: "no one should have a headach but a boy of sixteen who has been drunk overnight. But what can I do, pretty Bertha; I'm no leech, and am more accustomed to bleeding men than bleeding women?"

"Ay, but Sir Knight, you can send down to the chapel, where one of the monks will be found. They all know something of leechcraft; and if Father George is there, he knows a great deal."

"But it's growing dark," said Sickendorf. "The gates must be shut in ten minutes, and we want all the men we have about

the place. Better wait till the Count comes back, and if she should be very bad, I'll tell you what you must do; mull half a pint of Zeller wine; put plenty of spice in, and a spoonful or two of honey. Let her drink that down at one draught,—that will cure her. It is just what cured me the only time I ever had a headach."

"Ay, but what would cure you might kill our lady," replied Bertha, who did not at all approve of the prescription. "I pray you, Herr Von Sickendorf, send down one of the men to the good father. What would you say if this were to turn out a fever after you refused to send for help?"

"A fever!" cried Sickendorf, "what has she done to get a fever? She has neither ridden fifty or sixty miles in a hot sun, nor lain out all night in a damp marsh; nor drunk three or four quarts of wine to heat her blood—Well, if I must send, I must; but mind, I do it with no good will, for I don't like to send any of the men out after gates closing."

Thus saying, he put his head out of the door, calling till the whole building echoed again: "Martin, Martin—Martin, I say;" and then returning to Bertha's side, he continued, "I don't think much of the monks. They can't be such holy men as people say, else they'd keep the wood clear of spirits and devils, and things of that kind. Why one of the men, who was looking out from the turret during the storm last night, vows he saw some kind of apparition just down below the chapel, fencing with the lightning, and playing at pitch and toss with balls of fire. Then all in a minute he vanished away.—Ah! Martin, you must go down to the chapel in the wood, and tell the priest to come up and see the lady Adelaide, who is ill; so let him bring his lancet with him."

"Nonsense," cried Bertha, "she will need no bleeding; you soldiers think of nothing but blood."

The man Martin dropped his head, and did not at all seem to like the task; but then gave a look through the window to the sky and

walked away, grumbling something which was neither heard by the old knight nor the young damsel. Bertha having performed her errand, was then tripping away; but Sickendorf caught her hand, saying, in a honied tone, "Stay a bit, my pretty maid, and chat with me, as you did with young Ferdinand this morning."

"No, indeed," cried Bertha, trying to withdraw her hand; "that was in the free air and sunshine, not in a dark hall—let me go, sir." But the next moment her eyes fixed upon something at the further end of the long room, and giving a loud scream she started back.

Sickendorf let go her hand, and turned round to look in the same direction, where two doors opened into the opposite sides of the hall. Both apparently were closed, but yet, from the one to the other he distinctly perceived a tall shadowy form, clothed in long garments, stalk slowly across, and disappear. The old man who would willingly have confronted a whole host of mortal enemies, and plunged his horse into a forest of spikes, now stood rooted

to the ground, with his teeth chattering and his knees shaking, a thousand-fold more terrified than the young girl beside him. Bertha seized the opportunity to hasten away to her mistress's apartments; and Sickendorf, who called after her in vain, thought the line of her retreat by the door behind them so excellent, that he followed as soon as he could regain strength to go.

Never in Sickendorf's life had he so eagerly desired companionship as when he quitted the hall; but companionship he could not find, of the kind and quality that befitted his rank and station. The old ritter would have felt himself degraded by associating with the common soldiers, or anybody who had not Von before his name; but Ferdinand he could not find; his companion, old Karl Von Mosbach, had accompanied the Count, with all the other persons of gentle birth who filled the various anomalous offices which then existed in the household of a high nobleman; and not even a crossbowman, who, as was generally admitted, had a

right to sit down to table with a knight, could be discovered by our worthy friend as he went grumbling through the castle.

"Hundert Schwerin!" he exclaimed; "to think of my seeing the ghost! Santa Maria! who'd have ever fancied it would have come into the hall? It looked to me, mighty like our poor dear lady that's gone, only it had a ong beard, and was six foot high. I wonder if our good lord did put her out of the way, as some people think!—What could it want in the hall? Very saucy of an apparition to show itself there, unless it were at meal times, when, poor thing! it might want something to eat and drink. It must be cold and hungry work to go shivering about all night in vaults and passages, and to sneak back to its hiding-hole at daylight. I'd rather stand sentry on the northern'st tower in the middle of January. I wonder if I shall ever be a ghost! I should not like it at all. I'll have this one laid, however, if it costs me five crowns out of my own pocket; for we shan't be safe in our

rooms, if it goes on in this way, unless we huddle up five or six together, like young pigs in a sty. Donner! where can that young dog, Ferdinand, be? I won't tell him what I've seen, for he'll only laugh; but I'll call him to talk about the Lady Adelaide; he's very fond of her, and will like to hear about her being ill;" and, raising his voice, with these friendly intentions, he called up the stairs which led to the young gentleman's room,—"Ferdinand! Ferdinand!—I want you, scapegrace!"

"What is it, ritter?" answered the voice of Ferdinand from above; "I'm busy, just now; I'll come in a minute."

"But I want you now," answered Sickendorf, who was determined not to be left longer without society than was necessary;—"Come hither and speak to me, or I will come to you."

Ferdinand said a word or two to some one above, and then came unwillingly down the stairs.

"Ah, wild one!" said the old knight, "what would you have given to be in my place just

now? I've had a chat with pretty mistress Bertha, just between light and dark, in the hall."

"Indeed!" answered Ferdinand. "I dare say it was very innocent, Sickendorf; and so was my chat with her on the battlements. But what might she want with you?"

"Why, the Lady Adelaide is very ill," replied Sickendorf.

"Ill!" exclaimed Ferdinand, in a tone of much alarm. "What, the Lady Adelaide! She seemed quite well this morning."

"Ay, but women change like the wind," said Sickendorf; "and she's ill now, however; so I've sent down to the chapel for the priest to come up and say what's to be done for her."

"Why, Father George is in my room now," replied Ferdinand, "giving me good counsel and advice."

"Send him down, then,—send him down, quick," said Sickendorf; "and then come and talk with me: I've a good deal to say."

Ferdinand sped away with a much more rapid step than that which had brought him thither, and returned in a few seconds with the good priest, whose face, as far as Sickendorf could see it, in the increasing darkness, expressed much less alarm than that which the lover's countenance had displayed.

"'T is nothing,—'t is nothing," he said, after speaking with the old knight for a moment, on the lady's illness; "some trifle that will soon pass. But I will go and see;" and, accompanied by Ferdinand and the old soldier as far as the door of Adelaide's apartments, he went in without ceremony.

While he remained,—and he staid for more than an hour, Ferdinand and Sickendorf continued walking up and down the corridor, and only went beyond it to order the hall and the passages to be lighted. Their conversation was entirely of the Lady Adelaide and her illness; for though, with the invariable garrulity of one who had seen a marvel, Sickendorf more than a dozen times approached the sub-

ject of the apparition, ready to pour the whole tale into Ferdinand's ear, notwithstanding all his resolutions to the contrary, the young man was still more occupied with the thoughts of his fair lady's state, than the old knight with the memory of the ghost, and he ever turned back to that topic just when the whole history was about to be related. Then Sickendorf would discourse learnedly upon calentures and fevers, hot and cold, describe the humours that ferment in man's blood, and tell what are the vapours that rise from their fermentation; shake his head and declare that it was a wondrous pity young girls should be so given phthisick, which often carried them off in the flower of their age, and the lustre of their beauty; and, shaking his head when he pronounced Adelaide's name, would declare that she looked sadly frail of late, doubting whether she would last another winter. But as all this—though it served to torment in a terrible manner the heart of the young lover—would probably not prove very entertaining to the reader, we will

pass over the further particulars till the good father's return. By this time, to Sickendorf's great comfort and consolation, there was as much light shed through the corridor, from a great crescet at one end and a lantern at the other, as the passages of the castle ever displayed. It was not very brilliant, indeed, but sufficiently so to show that Father George's countenance was perfectly cheerful and calm; and in answer to the eager questions of Ferdinand, and the less anxious inquiries of the old knight, he said,—"Oh, the lady is better; 't is but a little passing cloud, and she will be as well as ever ere the morning."

"Have you let her blood?" asked Sickendorf.

"Nay, no need of that," answered Father George. "Her illness came but from some melancholy fumes, rising from the heart to the head. That I have remedied, and she is better already,—but I must hasten back, for I may be needed at the chapel."

"Stay, stay, good father," cried the old

knight; "I have something to ask of you. I will go with you to the gate;" and walking on with Father George, he entertained him with an account of the apparition he had seen in the hall, and besought him to take the most canonical means of laying the unwelcome visitant, by the heels, in the Red Sea; or if that could not be done for a matter of five or ten crowns, at least to put up such prayers on his behalf, as would secure him against any farther personal acquaintance with it.

Father George smiled quietly at the old knight's tale, and assured him he would do his best in the case, after due consideration. Then, hastening away, he passed down the hill, and just reached the door of his temporary dwelling, when the sound of many horses' feet, coming up from below, announced the return of the Count to Ehrenstein. Father George, however, did not wait to salute the nobleman as he passed, or to communicate to him the fact of his daughter's illness, but entered his little cell, and closing the door

listened for a moment or two as the long train passed by, and then lighted his lamp.

In the mean time the Count rode on, with somewhat jaded horses, and at a slow pace, looking to the right and left, through the dim obscurity of the night, as if he, too, were not altogether without apprehensions of some terrible sight presenting itself. More than once he struck his horse suddenly with the spur, and not one word did he interchange with any of his followers, from the time he crossed the bridge till he arrived at the Castle gates. He was met under the archway by Sickendorf and Ferdinand, the *schloss vôght*, or castle bailiff, and two or three of the guard. But he noticed no one except the old knight, whom he took by the arm, and walked on with him into the hall.

"What news, Sickendorf?" he said. "Has anything happened since I went?"

"Ay, two or three things, my lord," replied Sickendorf. "In the first place, the lady

Adelaide has been ill, headachy, and drooping, like a sick falcon."

"Pooh! some woman's ailment, that will be gone to-morrow," replied the Count.

"Ay, so says Father George, whom I sent for, to see her," answered Sickendorf. And finding that his lord paid very little attention to the state of his daughter's health, he went on to give him an account of his foraging expedition in the morning, dwelling long and minutely upon the number of ducks, capons, geese, sheep, and lambs, which he had obtained, and dilating somewhat at large upon his conversation with sundry retainers and vassals of the Count whom he had summoned in the course of his ride to present themselves at the castle on the following day.

Such details of all that was said by the peasantry were usually very much desired by the Count, whose jealous and suspicious disposition made him eager to glean every little indication of the feelings and sentiments of the

people towards him, but on the present occasion Sickendorf's long-winded narrative seemed to weary and irritate him, and after many not very complimentary interjections, he stopped him, saying, "There, there, that will do; there will be enough, doubtless, both of geese and asses, capons and boors;" and he remained standing with his eyes fixed upon the ground, in thought.

"I fear, my good lord," said the bluff old soldier, who generally took the liberty of saying what he liked, "that you have not been very successful in your expedition; for you seem to have come home in a mighty ill humour—I suppose the money isn't so much as you expected."

"No, no; it is not that," answered the Count, "I never expected any till this morning, so it is all pure gain, and a good large sum too, when it arrives. Heaven send it come safe! for Count Frederick has not brought it with him, but trusted it to some of the lazy merchants of Pisa.—No, no, it isn't that,

Sickendorf. But there are things I love not about this place. By Heaven! I have a great mind to take a torch, set fire to yon old rafters, and burn the whole of it to the ground."

"Better do that to your enemy's mansion than your own," answered Sickendorf, drily, and a good deal surprised at his lord's vehemence.

"Ay, but my enemy has a house that won't burn," answered the Count. "You can't burn the grave, Sickendorf—that's a vain effort. What I mean is, that these stories of spirits and unearthly beings wandering here and there around us, oppress me, Sickendorf. Why should I call them stories? Have I not seen? Do I not know?"

"Ay, and I have seen, too," answered Sickendorf; "but I never knew you had, my good lord."

"Why, this very night," continued the Count, grasping his arm tight, and speaking in a low tone, "as I came through the woods, wherever I turned my eyes, I saw nought but

dim figures, flitting about amongst the trees; none distinct enough to trace either form or feature, but still sufficiently clear to show that the tale of the peasants and the women is but too true—."

"Peasants and women, sir!" cried Sickendorf. "Knights and soldiers, too, if you please. Why, within the last two months, ghosts have been as plenty in the castle as holly berries on the hills. 'Tis but this very night, that, as I stood talking to Bertha about her lady's illness, here where we now stand—just in the twilight, between day and night—a tall, lank figure, in long, thin, flowing robes,—it might be in a shroud, for ought I know — crossed from that door to that, and disappeared. We both of us saw it, for her scream made me turn round. So you see the very hall itself is not safe. There should always be a tankard of red wine standing here—for I've heard that spirits will not come near red wine."

"Methinks we should soon find plenty of ghosts to drink it," answered the Count, with

a bitter laugh. "But it is very strange. I have done nought to merit this visitation."

"Something must be done to remedy it, my good lord," replied Sickendorf, "that is clear, or they will drive us out of this hall as they drove us out of the old one—That's to say, I suppose it was the ghosts drove us out of that; for though you did not say why you left it, all men suspected you had seen something."

The Count took a step or two backwards and forwards in the room, and then pausing opposite to Sickendorf, he replied, "No, my good friend, I saw nought there but in fancy. Yet was the fancy very strong! Each time I stood in that hall alone, it seemed as if my brother came and stood beside me; walked as I walked; and when I sat, placed himself opposite, glaring at me with the cold glassy eyes of death. It was fancy—I know it was fancy; for once I chased the phantom back against the bare cold wall, and there it disappeared; but yet the next night it was there again.—Why should it thus torment me," he

continued vehemently. "I slew him not; I ordered no one to slay him; I have done him no wrong." And he walked quickly up and down the room again, while Sickendorf followed more slowly, repeating,

"Well, my good lord, it's clear something must be tried to stop this, or we shan't get soldiers to stay in the castle. The rascals don't mind fighting anything of flesh and blood, but they are not fond of meeting with a thing when they don't know what it is. So I thought it the best way to speak with Father George about it, and ask him to lay my ghost—I've had enough of it, and don't wish to see such a thing any more."

"You did wrong—you did wrong, Sickendorf," answered his lord. "I do not wish these monks to meddle, they will soon be fancying that some great crime has been committed, and putting us all to penance, if not worse. We must find means to lay the ghost ourselves—spirit or devil, or whatever it may be."

"Well, then, my good lord, the only way is to laugh at it," answered Sickendorf. "I dare say one may become familiar with it in time, though it's ugly enough at first. One gets accustomed to everything, and why not to a ghost? We'll jest at him; and if he comes near me, I'll throw the stool at his head, and see if that will lay him—I am very sorry I spoke to Father George, if it displeases you; but, however, there's not much harm done, for the grey gowns of the abbey know everything that goes on; and the devil himself can't conceal his game from them."

"Too much, too much," answered the Count; "they're the pests of the land, prying and spying, and holding their betters in subjection. We are but the vassals of these monks, Sickendorf; and if I had my will, I'd burn their rookery about their ears."

"Ah, here comes Karl Von Mosbach," cried Sickendorf, glad to escape giving an answer to his lord's diatribe against the monks, for whom he retained all the superstitious venera-

tion of an earlier period. "Ay, and the Lady Adelaide, too! Why, bless your beautiful eyes, yon girl there told me you were ill, fair lady!"

"I have been somewhat indisposed, but I am well again now," answered Adelaide, advancing to her father. The Count, however, took little notice of her, calling Bertha to him, and making her give him an account of what she and Sickendorf had seen.

"Fancy, fancy, my dear father," cried Adelaide, when the girl had done, laughing much more joyously than was her wont. "These tales are told and listened to, till the eyes become accomplices of the imagination, and both combine to cheat us. Bertha came down in the grey twilight, to say that I was ill; and I will warrant, went trembling along the dark passages, and taking every suit of armour, and every shadow through the window, of soldier or of warder passing without, for a grim spirit in a shroud."

"Nay, nay, dear lady," cried Bertha, and

was about to defend herself, but the Count cut her short, turning to his daughter with a smile, and saying, "So these tales have not infected your fancy, Adelaide. You have no fears of ghosts or spirits?"

"Not I, indeed," answered the lady. "First, because I have never seen them, and next, because I know they would not hurt me, if I did. If they be unsubstantial they cannot harm me; and if I be innocent, they would not seek to do so, if they could. I fear them not, my father, and I only pray, if any are seen more, I may be called to behold them too."

The fair girl spoke more boldly and more lightly than she usually did, and through the rest of the evening the same cheerful spirit did not leave her. Seated with her father at the last meal of the day, she cheered him with conversation, and asked many a question regarding Count Frederick of Leiningen, and those he brought in his train.

"There is none that will fit thee for a

husband, I fear, my child," replied the Count who for the time had caught a portion of his daughter's gaiety. "They are all bluff old soldiers, like Sickendorf or Mosbach there. Even his very jester is white-headed, and his dwarf like a withered pippin."

"Methinks it would not be easy to jest if one were old," said Adelaide. "Gravity and age, I have always thought twin sisters."

"No, no," replied the Count, "that is because you know nought of the world, dear girl. Why Count Frederick himself is just the same gay, joyous soul as ever, and is as old as I am, or a year older. Now, I dare say, to your young eyes, I seem to have reached a vast antiquity, for it is only in looking back that space seems short. It appears but yesterday that I was a boy."

"Nay, I do not think you so very old," replied his daughter, smiling, "when I set you against Sickendorf, you seem but a youth."

"But when you compare me with Ferdi-

mand," replied her father, laughing, "I am quite an old man. Is it not so, child?"

Adelaide neither answered nor coloured, as might have been perhaps expected, but smiled faintly and fell into thought; for it is wonderful what a vast chain of associations is very often spread out before the mind, by a few very simple words; and those associations are nine times out of ten totally different from any that the speaker intended to awaken.

It was so in this case. The comparison of her lover's light and active youth, with the gay rose upon the cheek, the glossy unchanged hair, the movements full of elastic life, the eye lighted up with that heart's fire, which, like the watcher's lamp, grows slowly dimmer with each passing hour, and her pale, thoughtful father, with his stern look, his rigid air, his hair thickly scattered with the snow of time, went on to take in the two elder men where the progress of decay had passed its first stage; and at each step her fancy halted to ask, "And will he whom I love soon be like this—and

this?" Her father had said, it seemed but yesterday that he was a boy; and Adelaide thought, "It may be but to-morrow ere I look back upon these days and feel the same. From time to time a sudden consciousness of the great truth, that mortal life is but a point amidst eternity, seems to burst upon us and is then lost again—the whisper of an angel drowned in the tumult of earthly hopes and fears.

Before she had roused herself from her reverie, Sickendorf had taken up the conversation, saying, "And so, my good lord, Count Frederick is as gay and jovial as ever? I remember you and him, and the late Count, your brother, all curly headed boys together—two merry ones and one grave one; for you were always more serious than the rest."

"Because I had less cause for merriment," replied the Count, with a cloud coming over his brow. "They wanted to make a priest of me at that time, Sickendorf; and it was not to my taste—But do not let us talk of those days.

The past is always a sad subject. You will see our friend to-morrow; for he will be here ere nightfall, and may stop a week or more, so that we must have all things prepared. The great hall, too, must be made ready; for we shall not have room here. The casements must be mended early to-morrow; and the dust cleaned off the walls and banners."

Sickendorf did not answer, but looked at the Count stedfastly, with an inquiring air, in reply to which his lord nodded, saying, "It must be done."

"By my faith! my good lord," cried Karl Von Mosbach, "you won't get many people willing to do it; for every one says that the hall is haunted; and we love not even passing by the door."

"We will have it sprinkled with holy water," replied the Count, somewhat bitterly; "but do not tell me that any of my men will refuse to obey my orders, or I will shame you all by a girl."

There was no reply; and the Count de-

manded angrily, addressing himself to none in particular, "Are you afraid?"—Here, Adelaide, will you undertake to deck the hall with flowers, and strew the floor with rushes?"

"Willingly, willingly, my dear father," answered the fair girl; "and you shall see how gaily I will trick it out."

"I beseech you, my lord, to pardon me," said Ferdinand, "but I am not afraid at all to obey anything that you command; and I can very well spare the Lady Adelaide the trouble in the hall; if she will but wreathe the garlands for me."

"You have a heart of steel, good youth," replied the Count; "what if I tell you now to go and bring me the banner which hangs between the shields at the farther end of the hall?"

"I will do it at once, my lord," replied Ferdinand, rising.

The Count fixed his eyes upon him, and Adelaide also gazed at him earnestly. Th young man's cheek might lose a shade of

colour; but still he seemed perfectly willing; and his lord nodded, saying, "Go!"

"I must take a light, or I may not be able to get down the banner," replied Ferdinand.

"The moon shines clear through the casements," answered the Count. "You will need no other light."

The young man made no reply, but drew his sword-belt a little forward and walked calmly to the door. One or two of the men followed him out of the room; not with the intention of accompanying him; for none of them very much liked the task, but merely with the idle curiosity of seeing him cross the passages and enter the hall. In a minute or two they returned; and one of them said, "He has got in, my lord, but whether he will come out again, I can't tell."

"Got in!" repeated the Count, "What do you mean, Ernst?"

"Why, we watched him from the stone steps," replied the soldier, "and he lifted the latch and shook the door, but at first it would

not open. After a while, however, it was suddenly flung back, and in he went."

"Did he close it behind him?" asked the Count, and Adelaide gazed anxiously on the man's face, in expectation of his answer.

"Some one did," replied the soldier, "but I can't tell whether it was he or not."

Thus saying he took his seat again at the table, and all remained silent for several minutes, waiting with different degrees of anxiety for the result.

"The boy is mad," murmured Sickendorf, to himself, after two or three more minutes had elapsed; and then he added aloud, "Hundred thousand! we must not leave this lad to be strangled by the ghosts, or devils, or whatever they are, my lord."

"I will go myself," replied the Count, rising from the table; "let those who will, follow me."

"Stay, let us get some torches," cried Karl Von Mosbach.

But just at that moment there was a clang

which shook the whole castle; and while the party assembled gazed on each other's faces in doubt and consternation, the door of the hall in which they were was thrown quickly open, and Ferdinand entered bearing a banner in his hand. His face was very pale; but his brow was stern and contracted, and advancing direct towards the Count, who had come down from the step on which his table was raised, he laid the banner before him.

"His lord gazed from the banner to his face, and from his face back to the banner, which was torn and soiled, and stained in many places with blood. "How is this?" he exclaimed, at length. "This is not what I sent you for!"

"This is the banner, my lord," replied Ferdinand; "which was hanging between the two shields at the farther end of the hall, over your chair of state."

Old Sickendorf bent down over the tattered silk, on which was embroidered a lion with its paw upon a crescent; and as he did so, he murmured, with a shake of the head, "Your bro-

ther's banner, sir, which he carried with him to the East."

"What have you seen?" demanded the Count, sinking his voice, and fixing his eyes upon the young man's countenance.

"Not now, my lord," replied Ferdinand, in the same low tone; "another time, when you are alone, and have leisure."

The Count made no reply, but seated himself at the table, and leaned his head thoughtfully upon his hand for a moment or two, while the rest of the party remained in groups around, some gazing from a distance at the banner, some looking at it more closely, but none speaking in a louder tone than a low whisper. It was not, indeed, that they were kept silent by any ceremonious respect for their lord; for those were days of much homely freedom of demeanor; and that distance and reserve did not exist between a chief and his followers which a higher and more fastidious state of civilization has introduced. But there was a feeling of awe approaching to terror, in

the bosoms of all, which oppressed them in their speech. Each asked himself, what could this mysterious event mean? how had the banner come where it was found? what did it all portend? for none, in those days of superstition, doubted that the event which had just taken place was an omen of others yet to come. The pale cheek with which Ferdinand of Altenburg had returned, too, and his grave stern look, as he stood by the table where he had lately been sitting, attracted observation, and led every one to believe that there was more to be told, though they had not heard his reply to their lord's question.

At length, however, to the surprise of all, the Count suddenly shook off his gloomy and abstracted look, and pushed across the flagon of choice wine, which stood at his right, to his young follower, saying, with a laugh, "Come, drink a cup of wine to me, Ferdinand the ghost-queller. By the Lord! there is not a braver man amongst us than thou art, boy. Would to Heaven! that all here would follow

thine example. I, for one, will do so, and think no more of these strange things than if they were but the whisperings of the wind through the trees. Drink, good youth! drink."

Ferdinand filled a cup and drank to his lord; and the next moment the Count rose again, exclaiming, "Now, to bed, to bed, we must all be up by cock-crow for our preparations. I will sup in the old hall to-morrow, if all the devils on the earth or under it should be its tenants;" and thus saying he left the room, followed quickly by Ferdinand, who did not choose to undergo the questionings of his comrades. The others remained for a few minutes, shaking the wise head and commenting gravely; and then by threes and fours quitted the hall, and retired to rest; but there was much oil burned in the Castle of Ehrenstein that night.

CHAPTER VII.

The Count of Ehrenstein tossed uneasily on his bed, in that state between sleeping and waking, when the mind neither enjoys quiet repose, nor yet lives as an active being dissevered from the body, in continuous and regular dreams—when scattered and disjointed fragments of visions cross the imagination—when voices call and suddenly sink away from the ear—when figures appear for an instant, and are lost before we can accurately see what they are. Often his bosom heaved and panted, as if oppressed with some terrible load. Often murmured words and smothered cries broke low and indistinctly from his lips. Often the eyeballs would roll under their filmy curtain,

as if some sight of horror presented itself to fancy.

At length the grey light of day streamed through the narrow window, and fell upon the sleeping man's countenance; and then having turned for a moment from side to side, he started up and gazed towards the casement, with a bewildered look, as if he knew not where he was. After leaning his head upon his hand, and apparently thinking deeply for several minutes, he rose and dressed himself without aid. Then walking to the little dark anteroom, in which two of his attendants, or *knechts*, were sleeping, he drew back the bolt of the door—for his was not a heart without suspicion—and stirred one of the men with his foot, as he lay upon the ground, bidding him go and tell Ferdinand of Altenburg to come down upon the eastern rampart immediately. Having given these orders, he himself issued forth, and walked slowly up and down, now casting his eyes upon the stones beneath his feet, now gazing at the rising sun. But

few minutes had elapsed, however, ere Ferdinand was at his side, and the Count turned towards him, saying, "What! up so early? You should have no dreams, young man, to break your rest."

"Nay, my lord," replied Ferdinand, "every one dreams, I suppose. Have you been disturbed?"

"That have I," answered the Count. "I have seldom passed a more troublous night, and yet I was weary, too, when I went to rest."

"Were they good or evil visions, my lord," asked the young man. "Mine were all bright."

"Would that mine had been so!" answered the Count. "But they were wild and whirling things, and 't is no matter — and yet these undigested thoughts," he continued, after a short pause, "these fanciful nothings of the dreaming brain, trouble us as much at the time as fierce realities — nay, perhaps more. I have suffered more bitterly, at times, in some dark vision of the night — yes, even in my

corporeal frame, — than even choking death itself could inflict. I cannot but think that there is a land to which the spirits of the sleeping travel for a time, and undergo a strange and wayward fate, till they are called back again. I've often fancied there must be such a place: a kingdom of dreams, as it were, to which all the strange actions and thoughts of the world are sent as soon as done, as a sort of commodity or merchandize, and there are mingled up by some fantastic power with the productions of the land itself. There go the images of the dead, the voices that are lost upon the earth, the passionate loves and follies of our youth, the thirsty ambition of our manhood, the crimes and the temptations of all years, even the very thoughts of infancy, and there we find them all, when the spirit is summoned from the slumbering body to visit that strange country. Else, how is it, that when we lie with darkness all around us, no sight, no sound, no scent, to wake up memory, things long forgotten, faces that no effort of the

waking mind could call before the eye of fancy, voices that have long ceased to ring in the deafened ear of forgetfulness, come upon us, all strong and vivid as reality; ay, even the feelings also no longer suited to our state of being, totally dissonant to the condition of our corporeal frame or to our mental age:—such as the joys and pastimes of our early boyhood, and the prattled pleasures of our baby days?—Yet there they all are—bright as if in life, though strangely mixed with other wilder things, and cast into mad impossible array. Last night it seemed as if every action of my life, charmed by some frantic Orpheus, danced around me in wild and grotesque forms—never pausing till I had leisure to taste one joy, or power to resist one pang. Would to Heaven! I could be a boy again, and, with the knowledge of each act's results, live over life anew—It would be a very different one!"

Ferdinand had let him proceed without observation or question; indeed he was too much surprised to answer, for he had never

before heard the Count speak thus to any one. It seemed, in truth, more as if he were talking to himself than to his companion; as if the weight of thought overpowered him, and he cast down the burden where he could. But the young man's surprise was not less excited by the matter of the confidence, than by the confidence itself. He knew the Count was learned far beyond most of the nobles of his day. He knew that he was thoughtful; but he had ever seemed in disposition, worldly, grasping, avaricious; evil qualities, as he thought, perfectly incompatible with fancy. In his inexperience of the world, he was not aware how frequently habits of thought and of desire—often produced in us by the operation of a long train of ruling circumstances—overbear the natural bent of the mind, and lead us to a course of life, and to innumerable actions, utterly inharmonious with the original tone of the character. It is so; and there is scarcely any man who is not thus walled in by circumstances in his course; scarcely any tree that,

however upright its original shoot, is not bent by the prevailing wind. Nevertheless, when the mind is left free for a moment from the habitual influences,—when the passions that have been indulged are not called into play,—when the desires that have usurped a sway over us, are for a time without either object or opposition, the original character of the mind is suffered to indulge itself for a brief space, like a prisoner allowed a few moments of free air. So was it with the Count of Ehrenstein. Busy with the thoughts which had succeeded to his dreams, he forgot not only his motives for sending for the young man at his side, but also his habitual reserve; and led from one feeling to another, as he discoursed imaginatively of the visions of the night, he was hurried on to admit those sensations of regret which, sooner or later, visit every one of Adam's race, but which the pride that entered in us at the Fall forbids us to acknowledge.

Ferdinand had walked on by his side, thoughtful and interested, with his eyes, too,

bent down upon the pavement of the rampart, and eager to hear more. But soon after the Count paused, the young man brought the confession, if it may be so called, to a conclusion, by asking a question which would naturally rise in any simple and straightforward heart, saying,—"Is it not very easy to repair, my lord, that which has been done amiss?"

"No, no, youth," answered the Count, turning upon him, and speaking almost bitterly, "that is a foolish error. It is never possible to repair aught that has been done amiss. Each act, once performed, is irrevocable. It is more,—it is a foundation-stone upon which, under the lash of the stern taskmaster, Fate, we must, whether we will or not, build up a part of the fabric of our life. Now do not go, silly boy! and from what I have said raise up in your fanciful brain a belief that I have committed great crimes, and bitterly repent them. It is with me as with all men who have power to think, and who try from the past to extract guidance for the future.

I see small errors producing greater evils; I see pitiful mistakes, which were thought nothing at first, swelling with bitter consequences,—but nothing more. Every man, Ferdinand," and he laid his hand upon his shoulder with a sort of monitory gesture, "every man who has passed through a great part of life, is like one who has climbed a mountain and is destined to descend on the other side. If he turns round to look at the country he has travelled, he sees it spread forth beneath him, with all its roads and passes, rivers and valleys, laid out as in a map, and he will ever find he has often lost his way; that there were paths which would have led him to his object shorter than those he has taken; that the objects on which he has fixed his eyes to guide him on, were often wide of the right course; and, in a word, that he has not accomplished, in the summer day of life, one-half he might have done, with less labour, and by easier means. And now let us speak of other things. You would not say last night

what you had seen in the old hall; now tell me what befell you there. We were then in the hour of fanciful conceits, when the imagination wanders and easily receives false impressions. We are now in the broad light of the real day, and you can better tell, and I can better understand whatever you may have witnessed there."

"I did not wish to speak last night, my lord," replied Ferdinand, in a calm and easy tone, "because all the people about us have filled themselves with fears which would be quite as well away; and all I had to say would only have made them more afraid. I went straight to the hall as you directed—I do not mean to say that I would not rather have had a light—but neither flesh nor spirit shall turn me from doing what I have undertaken to perform. I found the door fastened, however, and after having lifted the latch, I shook it hard, but it did not give way. For a minute, I thought of coming back to tell you; but then I fancied that you and the rest

might doubt me, and I tried again. Just then I think I heard a heavy grating sound, but, however, the door opened, and I went in. At first I could hardly see—"

"Why, the moon shone, and must have given plenty of light through the windows," replied the Count.

"There was too much light, my good lord," answered Ferdinand. "I came out of the dark vestibule, and when I entered the hall, it was all in a blaze of light. The suits of old armour that stand against the wall had, each one, a gauntleted hand extended, and in it was a torch. It seemed, indeed, that there were more suits than usual, but I did not stay to count them, for as soon as I could see, I hurried on, passing the table where they were seated—"

"Who?" exclaimed the Count, "who were seated?"

"Nay, my lord, I cannot tell you," answered Ferdinand. "Some six or eight tall figures, each wrapped in a strange garment like a

shroud, dusty and soiled, as if they had lain long in the earth, covering the head, and falling down to the eyes. My heart felt very heavy, and beat fast, and I dared not look narrowly at them. But I drew my sword, and hurried on, mounting into the great chair to reach the banner; when, just as I laid my hand upon it, the voices of those round the table said, 'Health to the Count of Ehrenstein! health to the living dead!' and looking round, I saw that they had cups raised high, as if they were pursuing their unearthly wassail without seeing or noticing my presence. I felt somewhat faint and sick, but I tore down the banner, breaking, I fear, the rest that held it, and hurried out as fast as I could go. As I paused to take breath, I heard a loud clang behind, but what it was I do not know."

"We will see, we will see," said the Count, sternly; "six or eight, did you say?"

"Ay, my good lord, at the least," replied Ferdinand.

"Can there be some trick in this?" rejoined

the Count, and fell into a fit of deep thought, which occupied him for several minutes. "And yet all the men were in the hall," he continued, evidently showing which way his suspicions turned. "I marked the absence of none, except the horse boys."

"They would not dare, my lord," replied Ferdinand. "There is scarce a man in the whole castle would venture thither in the broad day, and surely none at night."

"True, true," rejoined the Count, "but yet they shall venture thither if I live till supper time. What could this clang be that followed your coming out? We all heard it, even at that distance."

"I shall soon see, my lord, if it have left any trace behind it, for should you hold your intention of feasting in the hall to-night, they shall not stop me from decking it forth as I have promised."

"You seem right willing to venture with these ghosts," said the Count, with his habitual sharp suspicion.

"They have done me no harm as yet, my lord," answered Ferdinand boldly, well understanding what was passing in the Count's mind. "When you have seen some such sight yourself, you will believe, but, doubtless, not till then. I would not myself unless I had seen."

"Well, I will try," replied the Count. "Come with me now, and perhaps we may discover what was the cause of this clatter, which shook the whole castle as you were returning."

He spoke somewhat scornfully, and Ferdinand made no reply, but followed as his lord led on, with hasty strides, as if either impatient to see the state of the hall with his own eyes, or fearful that his resolution would fail before his intention was fulfilled.

On their way they passed through the lesser hall, where their meals were now usually taken, and thence through a long stone passage, which crossed the entrance from the great gates, down a broad flight of steps, and into the vestibule by one of the smaller doors opposite to

that of the great hall. There the Count paused for a moment, as if he hesitated, then putting his hand upon the latch, he lifted it, and flung back the ponderous mass of wood-work, which yielded at once to his hand. With an eager and straining gaze, his eye ran round the wide vaulted chamber, which was vacant of every living thing; but still the sight that it presented offered strange confirmation of the tale which Ferdinand had told. The twelve suits of old armour, no longer in the mode and fashion of the time, which had been for many years ranged along the wall opposite to the windows, upon wooden standards that kept them in an erect position, were now cast prone upon the pavement, and the lances, swords, and axes, which had been arranged in fanciful devices, between them, were likewise strewed upon the ground as if they had been flung down at once by an earthquake. The old banners remained waving over head, but that which had formerly hung over the chair of state, and which the Count had sent Ferdinand to fetch on the pre-

ceding night, was no longer to be seen. The chair which had been the only piece of furniture left in the hall, stood there still, with its cushion of crimson velvet, affording a strange contrast to the air of desolation presented by the whole of the rest of the scene; the broken casements, the mouldering banners, the rusty suits of armour cast down, and the disjointed pavement, with the green grass growing up between the crevices of the stone.

The Count took a step across the threshold, and then stopped short, repeating several times, "This is very strange!" To have supposed that Ferdinand himself had cast the armour down, was out of the question, for it would have taken him half an hour to do it, and the first impression upon the Count's mind was evidently one of awe, if not of terror. But still there seemed to be doubts, or else he thought fit to assume them to cover the emotions which he really felt; for after remaining for several minutes in the same position, he turned suddenly round to his young companion, inquiring,

"Where sat these things you saw? Here is neither board nor bench, for them to hold their revels."

Ferdinand's face was very grave, and even sad, but he replied at once, walking some ten paces forward, to a spot on the left-hand side of the hall; "Here they were seated, my lord, or appeared to be so."

The Count followed him, and gazed upon the ground. "They have left no traces of their presence," he said, at length, and then looking up to the vacant space where his banner had formerly hung, he asked, "And did you really take that thing you brought me from that place. The rest does not seem broken."

"I thought I heard it break, my lord," replied the young man, walking on towards the chair; but then, stopping as he came up to it, he said, "Here are the marks of my feet, my lord, in the dust upon the cushion."

"Well, well, I do not doubt you," said the Count, who had followed; and then crossing his arms upon his chest, he fell into

thought again, from which he did not rouse himself for a long time. In the end he exclaimed, with a start, "He shall not drive me hence—I have done him no wrong," and with a slow pace he trod his way back towards the door. "There, that will do," he continued, as Ferdinand followed him out; "I do not want you more; say nothing of what has happened to any one; and go fly your hawk, or wheel your horse till breakfast time; I will speak to you further afterwards."

When the hour of breakfast came, and the household were assembled in the hall, the Count again called Ferdinand up to his own table, and seemed to regard him with much more favour than he had ever done before; but the young man remarked that his lord's eye wandered round the chamber in which they sat, and then rested on the groups of his followers and attendants, as if calculating whether, with the numbers which were to be added that day to the party there assembled, the hall where they then were would contain them all.

A fairer object of contemplation, indeed, was before the young man's eyes, for he was seated opposite to the Lady Adelaide, on Sickendorf's left hand. She was a little paler, perhaps, than on the preceding morning, but that was the only trace which her temporary sickness seemed to have left. She was more than commonly gay; indeed, though there was a thoughtful and a feeling tone mingled with her cheerfulness, making it like the song of a lark, in which, though blithe and happy on the whole, may be heard sad minor tones by any ear that listens for them.

When the meal was over, the Count rose, saying, "Come with me, Ferdinand. Come hither, Adelaide; "and walking forth, he led the way to the corridor above, into which the different apartments occupied by himself, his daughter, and the maids, opened either directly, or through their several ante-rooms. There, after taking a turn backwards and forwards, he turned to his two young companions, who had followed, speaking with their

looks, and said, "To you two I must trust the arrangement of the great hall for our guests this evening. It is vain to ask these dastardly men below, who are frightened at mere shadows; and the other hall will not hold one-half—that is clear enough."

"Oh, ask them not, my dear father," answered Adelaide. "I and Ferdinand can do it all, and we have no fears."

"Good faith! dear lady," rejoined Ferdinand, "though I fear not, yet I somewhat doubt whether unaided we can accomplish all, at least in time. The armour has somehow fallen down, many of the lozenges of glass require to be replaced, and, in truth, I hardly know how I am to manage that. All the rest we might accomplish easily enough."

"That shall be done for you," said the Count, "if you and Adelaide can do the rest. I would not have my jesting friend and his gay followers come hither, and say, that they found the Castle of Ehrenstein in ruins, and its banquet hall as if it never saw a feast.

Do the best you can to give it some air of cheerfulness, wreathe the crescets and corbels with flowers — there are many in the woods just now — and with green branches; strew the pavement over thickly with rushes, so that no flaws be seen. As I go, I will send one to repair the casements who would beard the devil himself."

"He must come from far, my lord," answered Ferdinand, "for all the people near have got this tale. I first heard it down at the Abbey; and not one of the people of the village, I believe, would come up to save his soul."

"Not very far either," replied the Count; "within a mile of the Abbey, on the other side. You know Franz Creussen, the great blacksmith? He'll not fear, I warrant. Why look you so surprised, youth?"

"Because, my lord, I one day heard you threaten to split his skull," said Ferdinand, "when he refused to shoe your horses; and certainly he never showed you any great reverence."

"It would take a sharp sword to split his skull," rejoined the Count. "A thick-headed blockhead, as rude and as hard as the iron that he hammers, but if he answers my purpose that is all I heed. He that doesn't fear me within ten miles around, is not likely to be easily frightened—I must set forth in half an hour, to meet my noble guest by the way; and as I go, I'll speak to the man, so that he shall be up before mid-day. Now, Adelaide, my child, go with your girls and gather the flowers and tender branches, so that you may make the dull old hall look light and cheerful as yourself, for there will we all sup to-night, even if the fiend says, Nay."

Thus saying, he left her standing with Ferdinand. It is strange—it is very strange, that blindness which in some circumstances comes over the most clear-sighted upon the questions in which they feel the deepest interest. But yet it is so common—I might say, so invariable—that let no one think it unnatural the Count of Ehrenstein should actually throw his daughter

into the way of one to whom he would never have consented to give her. It was perhaps because he thought it impossible that such presumptuous love could enter into the young man's thoughts. It was the blindest of all passions—pride—that dimmed even his keen eyes; and there he left them to the brief caress, the low spoken words of love, the looks far more eloquent. They both said they must part at once, yet they both lingered; they both thought it was no use to risk aught by staying there when they were to meet again so soon in the old hall, yet the near future could not win them from the sweet present. They both knew it was dangerous to be seen in close companionship, and yet the hands met and the thrilling fingers clasped upon each other. Adelaide would fain hear what had befallen Ferdinand in the old hall; and he answered by telling how he loved her. She urged him to go, and to let her go, and he tried—oh, vain endeavour!—to explain to her the burning thirst of a young lover's heart to

be near her he loves. He told her that one might as well expect the parched traveller over the Syrian sands to forbear the well as to ask him to quit her while she would stay; and Adelaide believed it without difficulty. They said much one way or another, and yet their conference was not long; for some noise upon the staircase scared them, and with a fresh spring of joy in their hearts from their brief interview, they parted for the time and hurried to their several tasks with the glad hope of meeting soon again.

CHAPTER VIII.

FERDINAND was busy at his work about a quarter of an hour after the Count of Ehrenstein had ridden forth with his train. The castle was left even more empty than the day before, for Sickendorf and his party had gone with their lord, and none of the feudal retainers of the house had yet arrived. Some grooms and horse-boys in the stables, and eight or ten men on the walls, or in the courts, were all that remained behind, besides the young gentleman himself; and they were not at all disposed to aid or interrupt him by their presence in a place which they all viewed with dread, even when they passed it at a distance. Many were their comments, indeed,

upon his daring; and several of those comments were by no means favourable to their young lady's lover, for while some of the men wondered how Master Ferdinand was getting on, without venturing to go and see, others went the length of supposing that he must have either some amulet from the Holy Land, which was a charm against spirits, or a plain compact with the evil one, which gave him the command over them for a time.

In the mean while, Ferdinand worked away at his unaccustomed occupation, perhaps not quite so dexterously as if he had been an armourer's man, or a groom of the chambers to some great lord; but he did it cheerfully, and without apprehension; for the gay sunbeams shone through the dim casements and chequered the old mouldy pavement with a bright fretwork of light and shade. His heart, too, felt very summery, for there was hope within, and the expectation of love. Everything was done quickly, too, for he fancied that he might not be long without the

presence of one he loved, and thought that every moment thus busily employed might well purchase one of sweeter occupation.

His first task was to raise the different suits of armour from the ground, and fix them in their places again. Nor was this an easy undertaking, for, in many cases, the thongs and buckles had given way in the fall, and the several pieces were scattered about, and had to be re-united. Nevertheless, he worked on zealously, stooping over the quaint old garments of steel, lifting their ponderous masses, and ever and anon casting back from his face the thick, glossy curls of his hair, as they fell over his brow and eyes. He showed no signs of fear, notwithstanding the strange sights which he had seen on the two preceding nights; he never started at the sound of the wind; he never turned to give the timid glance over his shoulder towards the door leading to the vaults; but more than once he looked towards the other entrance of the hall, and listened for any sound from the vestibule. At length, as he

was raising one of the suits of harness, where the rusty gauntlet and vantbrace were still stretched out, as he had seen them on his previous visit, some white spots upon the steel, seemed to catch his eye, and to awaken a train of new and interesting ideas, for he paused in his work, and with his hand to his brow, remained in deep thought for several minutes, with a smile upon his lips.

As he thus stood, the sound of voices speaking near the door was heard, and it was gently pushed open, while the well-known tones of Bertha exclaimed, — "I would not go in for Neustadt, and you do not want me, either, dear lady, — you know you do not; but I'll stay here and watch against any ghosts on this side. I'll open that other door, however, and have more light; for spirits don't like the daylight, and I don't like the dark."

"Well, stay there, — stay there, then," answered Adelaide; "I can carry in the wreaths myself."

Ere she concluded, Ferdinand was by her side, and, raising up the flowers and young branches which Bertha and her mistress had brought thither, he carried them in and laid them down upon the pavement of the hall. Bertha's merry eye was first turned, with a somewhat timid and apprehensive glance, towards the interior of the chamber, and then, with a meaning smile, to Ferdinand's countenance. As soon, however, as the lady had followed her lover in, the discreet damsel closed the door, murmuring to herself—"Well, love 's the best charm against evil spirits, after all! Heigho!—I wish I had somebody to love!"

By this time, Ferdinand's hand clasped that of Adelaide; but I have noticed before that a strange change had come over the fair girl since their meeting on the preceding day; and that change was more apparent now than ever. All doubt, all timidity seemed to be banished. There was no boldness, it is true, for modest gentleness seemed an inherent part of her

nature; but the fear, the anxiety, the hesitation of unconfirmed and perilous love, no longer had any influence over her. When Ferdinand's hand clasped hers, she laid the other upon it, gazing in his eyes with a warm and affectionate light beaming in her own, and saying with a thoughtful, if not absent air, as if the question she put was as much to her own heart as to him,—"You love me, dear Ferdinand,—is it not so? And you will ever love me, and never do aught to grieve me, nor let others grieve me, if you can help it?"

"Can you doubt it, beloved?" cried Ferdinand, drawing her to him; "is not my whole heart and being only love for you?"

"Nay, I do not doubt it," answered Adelaide; "I will not doubt it.—Yet I have heard tales of men vowing deep vows, and breaking them; of their looking upon woman, and woman's love, but as a flower to be gathered and cast away: but I will not believe it. No, no!—we have known and loved in childhood, and we will love still. I will trust you, dear

Ferdinand,—I will trust you; only promise me that if the time should ever come when deep grief and pain menaces your Adelaide, and it is in your power, by any act, to avert it, you will do so, whatever be the consequences."

"Can you suppose I would hesitate?" exclaimed Ferdinand, eagerly; "but I do promise, dear one!—I vow by all I hold sacred,—by all that is dearest to me, that you shall never ask me aught that can remove a grief from you, without my doing it at once."

"Thank you,—thank you," answered Adelaide, resting her face upon his shoulder, while he kissed her soft cheek; "then I am happy!" —then I am all yours! I have longed for this moment to come, Ferdinand, for I wished to say all that might be said; and to tell the truth, it was for this opportunity I undertook so readily the task we have here to perform."

"And are you really not afraid, dear Adelaide?" asked her lover. "For, certainly, here I have seen fearful sights, though I think

it must be a demon, indeed, that could harm you. Have you no fears?"

"None, none, in the world," she answered, gaily; "I set all spirits at defiance, Ferdinand, but the spirit of love; and it would have needed somewhat more than imaginary terrors to keep me away from you to-day, when we have so fair an opportunity of saying all that we could wish to each other."

"Nay, not all," answered Ferdinand; "there is no day, no hour, when I shall not have something more to say to you; if it be but to tell you, again and again, how I love you, how I thank you.—But there may be more, much more, to be said, dear Adelaide; there may be difficulties, dangers, unforeseen circumstances; and even with Bertha's aid, it may be impossible to communicate them to you fully and freely, without seeing you and speaking to you myself."

"Well, then, I will come to you," replied Adelaide, with a beaming smile, as if to banish all his apprehensions, like mist before the

sun; "or if not, you shall come to me. I have no hesitation, I have no doubt now. All yesterday, after we parted, I was full of gloomy thoughts and dark apprehensions. I was like one wandering by night in a wood, and losing his way, to whichever side he turns. I was doubtful of myself, doubtful of you, doubtful of the past, doubtful of the future; but that has vanished away, and I am all your own."

"And what dispelled it?" asked Ferdinand.

"One word," answered Adelaide; "but you must not question me farther. I say I will come to you, or you shall come to me, at any hour, at any season that it may be needful. —I know I can trust you," she continued, gazing at him with a look grave and yet tender, and then raising her eyes towards the sky, "I do believe, Ferdinand, that for the best gift under Heaven's sun, you would not wrong your Adelaide in word, or thought, or deed, and it is that trust, as well as some necessity, that makes me promise you thus boldly to find means of seeing you whenever you desire it. Should there be

danger to either of us, but especially to you, let me know it at once. Even if it be in the dead of the night, I should not be frightened, Ferdinand, if I saw you standing beside me,—ay, in the very spirit-walking time, when all mortal eyes are closed in sleep. I am very sure—quite sure, that you would not come without some real need, that no light motive would bring you, to my risk and to yours, and therefore I am thus bold, for love and confidence makes me so."

"Thank you, thank you, Adelaide. From my very heart I thank you," replied her lover, "not alone for the dear privilege you grant me; but from the trust that gives birth to the grant. You but judge me rightly, dear one. Your fair form, beyond all mortal beauty, may well charm my eyes; the touch of that dear hand, of that dear lip, may well be prized before all that earth can give; but not for the joy of heaven, my love, would I do aught that could tarnish the bright gem within that lovely casket. Your very confidence is a bond upon me, far stronger than your own

reserve could be; and in your happiness, if I could sow one regret, I should curse myself for ever."

"But why should regret mingle with happiness?" asked Adelaide, half gaily, half thoughtfully; "there must be some very wicked and some very discontented people in the world, to make it so. It seems to me, Ferdinand, that God has provided us with so many pleasures that can produce no regret, that we should show ourselves unworthy of his bounty did we seek others. Fields, gardens, mountains, forests, streams, these flowers, the singing of the birds, the sunshine and the sky, the very dream-like clouds and their soft showers, the changes of the seasons, music, thought,—calm, tranquil thought, the music of the mind—and every form of meditation, whether it be upon our own strange nature and mysterious destiny, or on God's mercy to his creatures, or his great power and infinite wisdom—all these, ay Ferdinand, and innocent love, too, are surely full of joy, unsoiled and

imperishable. They are like the notes of some tuneful instrument, each sweet in itself, but doubly sweet by those that go before, and follow and mingle with it in the harmony; and infinite, too, in change and in variety. What needs man more, that he should sully with his evil what God made pure and beautiful?"

"Ay, dear girl, and from one joy you have named, all others receive a tenfold brightness," answered Ferdinand; "innocent love has its own light to add to all the rest."

"I know it, Ferdinand; I feel it," answered Adelaide, "and I scruple not to tell you that I do; for once having said 'I love,' I have said all—though I one time thought I could never bring my lips to utter those two words."

"And I must ask no questions," said Ferdinand, "for your thoughts are changed, indeed, dear one."

"None, none;" answered Adelaide, with a gay laugh. "And now we must to our task, Ferdinand; for if they come and find it un-

performed, they may inquire in their own thoughts, how we have loitered so. Aid me to hang up these garlands, and to fix the green branches on the walls, and then I will go and seek the wreaths that Theresa is still weaving."

He did as she desired him, moving the great chair of state for her tiny feet to climb and hang the flowers on every prominent place that would hold them; and often he mounted thither too, and supported her, lest she should fall, with the arm cast lightly round her waist, and the hands, as they came in contact, when stretched out to reach the projecting beam, or cast the garland over the wood-work, often clasped together with the gentle pressure of warm love; and if, from time to time, they paused for a moment or two to speak of the things of their own hearts, their pleasant toil was resumed the instant after, and proceeded the more quickly, from the happy spirit that was in both.

It was a dream of love and joy, and the

flowers which Adelaide had brought were nearly all expended, when a rough voice was heard talking to Bertha, without, and Ferdinand sprang down lightly from the chair, and looked towards the door. It opened as he did so, and a man entered, on whose appearance I must pause for a moment, as we may see more of him hereafter.

CHAPTER IX.

The personage who broke in upon the conversation of Ferdinand and Adelaide must have been at least six or eight inches above the ordinary height of the human race. Nevertheless, though he undoubtedly looked a very tall man, and those who stood beside him felt themselves like pigmies, yet at first sight he did not seem so tall as he really was. Unlike most of those persons who deviate from the common standard, either above or below, there was no disproportion in his limbs, nor want of symmetry—the neck was not long, like that of a crane, the form was not spare and meagre, the joints were not large and heavy, the knees did not knock together as he

walked. If there was anything out of proportion, it was that the chest and upper part of the frame were even too broad and bulky; and the head was comparatively small; but it was round and well-shaped, with a capacious forehead, and the short brown hair curling round it like that of the Farnesian Hercules. The features of the face were good, but somewhat short, and the expression stern and bold. There were no wrinkles on that countenance, except a deep furrow between the eyes; and yet, by those indescribable indications which convinces us of a fact without our well knowing why, one judged in a moment that the man who entered was between forty-five and fifty years of age, though everything in his whole aspect and carriage denoted undiminished vigour and activity. Here and there, indeed, in his beard and hair, might be traced a single white line, but that was all that spoke the passing of years.

The dress of this worthy personage was that of a handicraftsman of moderate wealth. His

coat was of untanned leather, slashed here and there upon the arms—as was the custom of the times—and he wore before him a great leathern apron blackened and soiled, apparently with the labours of the forge. A little vanity, of the kind which the French call coquetry, was observable in the covering of his head, which was a cap or bonnet of black felt, bordered with a lace of gold; the brim was somewhat broad, slashed in the forms of one of the Greek mouldings, and turned back towards the crown, while a bunch of green feathers, taken, not from the wing of the ostrich, but rather from that of some more homely bird, stretched across the front, and leaned towards his left shoulder. His shoes, or rather half boots, for they came up to his ankle, were long, and pointed at the toe; and under one arm he carried a number of pieces of lead and iron, while his right hand was armed with a sledge hammer, which, wielded by him, might have brained an elephant.

Behind the blacksmith came a lad (bearing

a basket, full of various utensils of his trade), who, in any other situation, would have appeared a good-sized, comely youth, but who, by his side, looked a mere dwarf; and such was the effect of the man's appearance, that Adelaide, who had never beheld Franz Creussen before, turned somewhat pale at the sight, though Ferdinand welcomed him with a good-humoured smile of recognition, perhaps a little vexed that he had come so soon, but not attributing any blame to him on that account.

"Ha, ha, Master Ferdinand!" cried the giant, as soon as he saw him, "good-morning to you, sir, I thought how it would be—Why don't you help the lady? She can never get that bunch of flowers up there;" and at the same time striding forward, and towering above Adelaide even as she stood raised upon the chair, he stretched out his long, powerful arm, and fixed the wreath upon the spot she could not reach.

"You thought how what would be, Franz?" asked Ferdinand, who had remarked a pecu-

liar tone as the blacksmith spoke, and a glance of the eye from himself to Adelaide.

But Franz Creussen did not answer his question, going on in a rambling manner. "So there are ghosts here, the Count tells me; and all the men and women but you two are afraid. Let the ghosts come hither, and see if I will not split their skulls with my hammer."

"Why, Franz, I hardly thought you would come," answered Ferdinand; "I heard you once tell the Count you would neither shoe his horses, nor do work of any kind for him. I am glad to see you in a better humour."

"I would not have come," answered the blacksmith, "only he told me that all the people were afraid; and as I never yet saw a thing to be afraid of, I came to look if I could find it here. But I must set to work, Master Ferdinand.—God help us, how thou art grown! When I first saw thee, thou wert scarce half an ell high, and now thou art above my shoulder."

Ferdinand smiled, for though he was cer-

tainly above the blacksmith's shoulder, he was not much higher, and had no reason to believe he would ever rise above the height he had attained. Franz Creussen, however, turned abruptly to his work, and with the aid of his boy, soon unhinged the latticed part of the casement nearest the door, in which the largest fractures were perceptible. He then proceeded to another and another, while Ferdinand continued to aid the fair girl in ornamenting the other side of the hall, with somewhat less familiarity of demeanor; but nevertheless many a dear whispered word passed between them, as they hung the garlands, or shook the banners, or crowned the war crests of the old helmets with bunches of flowers.

At length, as the blacksmith reached the fourth window, Adelaide's store was exhausted, and she said, "I must go and bring more, Ferdinand; Theresa, I dare say, has twined plenty of wreaths by this time; and in the mean while, if you could drive some nails

between the stone-work of the arches, we could span over the vault with green branches, and make the old hall look like a forest bower."

"I will get Franz to help me," answered her lover; "his arm, I should think, would drive a nail into the heart of the stone, if it were needful."

As soon as she was gone, however, Franz handed down the lattice of the fourth window to his apprentice, saying, "There, carry that to the little court by the stables—I will work there. Then come for the others, boy;" and as the youth departed, the stout man leaned upon his hammer, and gazed after him till the door was closed.

"Come, Franz, help me to drive some nails in here, to hold some boughs," said Ferdinand. But Franz Creussen strode up to him, and grasping him tightly by the shoulder with his heavy hand, he said, in a low voice, bending down his head, "Be careful, be careful, young man."

"Be careful of what?" asked Ferdinand.

"Pooh! nonsense," cried Franz Creussen, "do you think others will not see what I see? and if they do, you may chance to go to bed one night, shorter by the head."

Ferdinand was somewhat puzzled how to answer. It was a case, perhaps, in which insincerity is tolerated by all the rules of social polity; but he knew the man who spoke to him to be honest and true-hearted, and one who had always displayed towards him a peculiar and remarkable degree of kindness and regard when he was almost at open enmity with all the rest of the Count of Ehrenstein's household. After a moment's hesitation, however, he answered, "I know not what you have seen, Franz, to make you use such words; but I wish you would speak more plainly. I do believe you love me, and would do all you can to serve me."

"Ay, more than you know, Master Ferdinand," replied the blacksmith. "Speak more plainly! Why I have spoken plainly enough.

Who is it makes love to his lord's daughter, and thinks that all other men are buzzards, and can only see by candle-light? I knew it would be so long ago, and told Father George so, too, when he first put you here."

"But if Father George wishes it," rejoined Ferdinand, looking up in his face.

"Why I suppose he knows best, then," answered the man, turning on his heel, "but it's a dangerous game. A neck's but a neck, and that's soon cut through.—But he knows more than I do, and I suppose he is right;" and thus saying, he searched his basket for a number of large nails that it contained, and was soon busily driving them in between the joints of the stone-work, without adding a word more.

In a minute after, his boy returned to take away another of the frames, and as soon as he was gone, Franz Creussen turned to Ferdinand again, and said, "I'll tell you what, young gentleman; Father George knows best, and so you must follow his counsel; but these

monks, though they manage all the world, do not always manage it as they like best; and if this matter should go wrong, and you should need help, you will always know where to find it, as long as Franz Creussen lives. In any time of need, come down to me if you can; and if you can't get out, which is not an unlikely case, get me down word, and the door will be strong indeed that Franz Creussen's arm cannot open."

"Thank you, Franz, thank you," answered Ferdinand, grasping his hand. "But I would not have you peril yourself for me. I must take my fate as I find it, and no fears for myself will stop me."

"That's right, that's right," answered Franz Creussen. "Life would not be worth keeping if it always wanted watching. But I don't fear peril either, good youth; and I can do more than you think, for there's many a man round about would follow my leathern apron as soon as a knight's banner; I can ride with as good a train, if I like it, as any baron in the land.

But all I tell you is, don't you wait too long. If you find yourself in danger come to Franz Creussen in time — the good Count is quick in his despatch; didn't he strangle the poor fellow who he thought—or said, whether he thought it or not — had stabbed his brother, within twelve hours after he brought home the news of the last Count's death?"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Ferdinand, "I was not aware he had done so."

"Ay, ay," answered the blacksmith, "he did it sure enough; you may see his bones, poor fellow, chained to the pillar against which they strangled him, down in the serf's burial vault—but that was before you came here, of course, so you can't know much of it."

"I was aware he had put him to death," replied Ferdinand, "but did not know he had been so prompt in his execution."

"He was, though," rejoined the blacksmith, "and for that reason, be you prompt too. If you see signs of danger, come to Franz

Creussen at once—better to him than to the Abbey, for though the monks hold their own well enough against the Count, they do not like to meddle in other people's quarrels; and it is likely there would be long consultations, before the end of which, the Abbey might be stormed, or at the end of which you might be given up."

"As he spoke, the Lady Adelaide returned with a fresh supply of garlands, and Franz Creussen turned away to drive in more nails on which to hang the branches; and, at the end of about a quarter of an hour, he quitted the hall, saying with a laugh,—"I'll go work at the casements, in the court; I am better there than here; and you shall have timely notice when the Count is coming up the hill."

"That man looked very strange," said Adelaide, "and spoke strangely too. Can he suspect anything, Ferdinand? He frightened me."

"Oh, do not fear him, dearest girl!" replied her lover; "he is honest and true, if ever one

prepare herself for the reception of her father's guests; but Ferdinand remained for a few minutes longer, to finish, with hurried hands, all that remained to be done, and then left the hall with Franz Creussen, who declared that he would now hasten home, adding, in a surly tone,—"I will not stay to see them revel who have no right to be here."

At the door, however, Ferdinand turned to look back, and mark the general effect which had been produced by the labours of the day. A pleasant, though a somewhat strangely mingled sight it was, and certainly the change which had been produced was very great. The old arches, with their fretted roofs above, the grey stone-work, from which the hue of age and disuse could not be removed, contrasted curiously with the gay garlands of bright summer flowers that crowned the chapters of the pillars, and hung in wavy lines along the walls. The green boughs, too, with their regular irregularity, forming a vault as it were within the vault, crossed in different directions by the

banners, now shaken clear of the dust which had long covered them, and the rushes with which the floor was thickly strewn, gave the old hall, as Adelaide had said, the appearance of a forest glade, dressed out with flags for some chivalrous holiday; and as he stood and looked around, strange dreamy visions crossed his mind, such as could present themselves only to fancy in a chivalrous age. Thoughts of wild and strange adventure, of renown in arms, of generous deeds and noble daring, of befriending the poor and needy, of supporting the weak and oppressed, of overthrowing the wrong-doer and delivering the wronged, mixed in strange confusion with sylvan sports and forest glades, and calm hours spent by castle hearths between. But in every scene, with every picture, came one fair, dear form; wherever fancy placed him, the bright soft eyes looked at him, the sweet lips smiled his reward. She whom he loved was the soul of all his imaginings, and he felt how truly it was that innocent love gave its own sunshine to

everything around. Even the hall he had just been decorating lost its light when she was gone, the old walls grew cold and damp, the flowers seemed not half so fair, the boughs appeared to droop more languidly. It all looked but half as gay as when Adelaide was there, and yet he saw not what could have been done better. Nevertheless, a great change had been effected; and when he compared the hall with what it had been, before he and Adelaide had undertaken its arrangement, he felt sure that his lord would think that they had laboured well during his absence, and though but half-contented with his work, hastened to his chamber to remove the dust from his face and hands, and don his festival attire.

CHAPTER X.

A BODY of about some sixty armed vassals of the house of Ehrenstein, was drawn up in the outer court of the castle. They were under different subordinate leaders, for by the subdivision of land, in descending from one generation to another, the exact number which had been originally assigned by tenure to different portions of the signory, had become somewhat confused, and also difficult to compute; for many small properties were now only bound to send half a man, and others one, two, or three and a half. As it was not so easy to divide a man as it had been found to divide the ground that nourished him, each little community was usually called upon to send

its aggregate number of soldiers, with whom was a chief appointed to command them under the lord of Ehrenstein, or one of his officers.

As Ferdinand of Altenburg was the only person of note in the household of the Count, who now remained in the castle, the villagers were, of course, under his guidance, and he endeavoured to array them in such a sort as to make the greatest possible display of force on the entrance of the lord of the castle with his guests. The outer gates, however, were closed by his orders, although some of the retainers thought it not a little strange that the young gentleman should shut the doors upon the Count himself. But Ferdinand knew well his task, and after directing a banner to be displayed upon the walls, he approached the gates, and waited with some impatience, listening for the sounds from without.

At length the shrill blast of a trumpet upon the bridge, within a few yards of the spot where he stood, showed him that the Count

was near; and opening the wicket, he demanded—"Who seeks to enter here?"

The trumpeter replied in the same tone—"The Count of Ehrenstein. Open the gates to your lord!" And the young gentleman instantly commanded them to be flung back, that the cavalcade might enter.

It consisted of some sixty or seventy men, with a number of baggage horses following in the rear. At the head of the first and principal group, appeared the Count himself, in the garments of peace, while on his left rode a fine-looking man, somewhat past the middle age, partially armed. His head was only covered with an ordinary velvet cap and plume, however, so that Ferdinand had a full opportunity of gazing at his features, and he did so with a degree of interest for which he knew no cause. He had heard of Count Frederick of Leiningen, indeed, as a gallant and skilful soldier, and a frank-hearted and amiable man. But he had seen many such without feeling the same sort of curiosity which he now

experienced. The Count's face was one that well expressed his character; blithe and good humoured, though with a high, thoughtful brow, while two or three scars upon his lip and cheek, showed that he had not acquired the glory of arms without tasting the perils and the pangs of war. His hair, nearly white, falling from beneath his cap, would have seemed to show a more advanced period of life than the Count of Ehrenstein had attained; but on the other hand, the guest was more upright and stately in person than his host, and rode his horse with a more martial air. Behind those two appeared old Sickendorf and Karl of Mosbach, with several knights of Count Frederick's train; and the first group was closed by a party which would have appeared very strange, and in most unnatural companionship to our eyes, though in those times it was of every day occurrence. On the right was a priest, in his ordinary riding apparel, bearing a dry branch of the Oriental palm in his hand; and on the left

rode a tall, powerful personage, whose motley garb, and sort of Phrygian bonnet, surmounted by a bell instead of a tassel, spoke him the jester of the high nobleman whom he followed. He, also, was past the middle age, and his beard, which seemed to have been once of a rich dark brown, was now thickly mingled with white; his eyebrows were quite blanched, but his eye was keen and quick, and his teeth white and perfect. The powerful horse that he bestrode, he managed with ease, and even grace; and as he came forward, he sent a rapid and marking glance over every tower and battlement of the castle, and round all the retainers of the house of Ehrenstein, scrutinizing each face, and then passing on. Behind these two, and mounted upon a horse as tall as those that went before, was a dwarf, excessively diminutive in size, and hideous in feature, form, and complexion; he was decked out in all the gayest colours that could be found, which seemed to render his deformity but the more apparent, and his small black

eyes twinkled from beneath his bent brows, with a dark, malicious expression, as if in that small frame there were a vast store of hatred for all human things more favoured by nature than himself. Some pages in attendance, of good birth, followed, and then the men at arms.

Just beyond the arch of the gateway stood the Lady Adelaide, with her women, looking more lovely—at least in the eyes of Ferdinand of Altenburg—than she had ever done before; the colour of her cheek heightened, and the light in her eye which can only be given by love. As soon as Count Frederick saw her, he spoke a few words to her father in a low voice; the Lord of Ehrenstein bowed his head, and his guest instantly sprang to the ground, and advancing gracefully to the lady, took her hand, and pressed his lips upon it. The rest of the party also dismounted, and Count Frederick, still holding Adelaide by the hand, and gazing upon her with a look of admiration and interest, was led to the

lesser hall, where her father, apologizing for being absent a moment, left him to the entertainment of the fair lady for a time, and hurrying back into the court, called Ferdinand to him.

"Is all prepared in the hall?" he asked, with a low voice.

"Yes, my good lord," replied the young man. "But I pray you do not go to see it yet, till it be lighted up. The evening is beginning to fall, and at supper-time it will show as you could wish it. So sweetly has Lady Adelaide decked it all, it seems as if she were born a queen of flowers, and that they do her bidding willingly."

The Count smiled, but went on to say, "Then you had nothing to interrupt you—none of these strange sights again?"

"None, none, my lord," answered Ferdinand. "The only strange sight that visited us during the day, was that giant Franz Creussen; but he did us good service, helped to reach up where we could not stretch our

arms, and in the labouring part did more than any one. He was only just gone when you arrived."

"He passed us on the road, without a word," replied the Count; "neither doffed his bonnet, nor made any sign of reverence. The time may come for a reckoning between me and good Franz Creussen, when we shall know whether the noble is to be bearded by a serf."

"I believe he means no harm, my lord Count," replied Ferdinand, warmly, but respectfully: "he has borne arms, I have heard, and is somewhat rough in manners; but all the country people speak well of him, and men say he is no serf, but of good blood."

"His trade is a churl's, at all events," replied the Count, frowning, "and the trade makes the man, youth.—I know right well he has borne arms—'tis that renders him insolent. The day will come, however—the day will come.—All men speak well of him, eh? Did you ever know any one of whom

all men spoke well, who was not a cunning knave, skilful in taking advantage of the follies of others for their own purposes? The man whom the rabble curse, is often their best friend; the fawning sycophant who panders to their caprices, uses them but as means, to cast them off when he has done with them."

Ferdinand could have well replied, that Franz Creussen was not one to fawn on any man; but he saw that his lord was in no mood to hear truth, and after giving a moment to gloomy thought, the Count repeated his question. "So all passed quietly?"

"So peacefully and lightly, my good lord," answered Ferdinand, "that standing there in the broad sunshine of the day, I could hardly believe that my eyes had not played me the knave last night, and cheated me with idle visions."

"Perhaps it was so," said the Count, "and yet that banner—that was no vision, Ferdinand. However, we must forget such things, and you must choose out twenty of the men

to be with us in the hall to-night. Lay my commands strictly on them to show no signs of fear, and forbid all the rest even to whisper one word of these vain tales to any of the guests. I have spoken with Sickendorf and Mosbach, already; but I trust more to you, Ferdinand, for they have doubts and fears that you are without. Neither, to say the truth, are they very courteous. Here, Sickendorf has been brawling already with one of Count Frederick's chief followers. You must try and keep peace and quietness, and see that hospitable courtesy be shown to all."

"I cannot meddle with Sickendorf and Mosbach, my lord," answered Ferdinand, "for they are knights, and I am none, and moreover, are my elders; but all the rest I can easily command, partly by love, and partly by authority, if you will delegate some power to me to rule them as I think best, when you are not present."

"I will, I will, good youth," replied the Count; "at supper-time I will do it publicly,

with thanks for what you have already done. You shall be my Master of the Household for the time, and in that character you must show every kind attention not only to Count Frederick himself, but to his favorite followers."

"There is sufficient good accommodation provided for his knights, my lord," answered Ferdinand. "I saw to that before I went to the hall. Everything is ready for seven, and I see but five."

"Good faith! there are others whom he cares for more than his knights," answered the Count. "There is the priest, ay, and the jester too. My old friend seems full of strange fantasies, and we must humour them. This fool whom he has with him saved his life in the Holy Land, it seems; and though he is at times somewhat insolent, even to his lord—as all such knavish fools are—not only does he bear with him patiently, but ever keeping in mind this one service, sets him at table with his knights, and listens to him

like an oracle. He and the priest must sit with us; and we may draw diversion from the one if not from the other. Be sure that you are civil to him, my good youth, for Count Frederick's friendship may stand me in good stead. Then there's a youth—there he stands, talking to Mosbach—a down-looking quick-eyed lad, who seems a favorite too."

"What is his name, my lord?" asked Ferdinand, turning his eyes in the direction of the group of which the Count spoke.

"Martin of Dillberg," said his lord. "He is a gentleman by birth, it seems, but of no very high nobility. Not like the Altenburgs," he continued, with a smile and a flattering tone, "whose very blood is wealth. So now go, Ferdinand, and see that all be arranged as I have said, for I must hie me back again, and lead this good lord to his apartments. You do the same for the others; and let the trumpet sound some minutes before supper, that we may all be gathered in the other hall."

Thus saying, he left him; but in the mean while some words of interest had passed between Adelaide and Count Frederick, who had remained with her near one of the windows, while the few attendants who had followed them were grouped together talking at the other end of the chamber.

He had gazed at her earnestly, but not offensively, when they first met, just within the castle gates. It was a look of kind almost paternal tenderness with which he appeared to interrogate her fair face. It seemed to say, Are you as good as you are beautiful, as happy as you are bright, sweet child? and twice, as he led her to the hall, he turned his head to look at her with the same expression; but as soon as they had entered, he said, turning towards the casement, "I feel as if we were old acquaintances, my dear young lady; so you must not think it strange that I treat you as one. I have known your father long and well—since we were boys together; and I knew

your uncle better still—a noble and high-minded man he was, as sportful as a child, and yet with the courage of a warrior, and the conduct of a sage—and I cannot help looking upon you almost as a daughter. Thus, if I do so sometimes, and seem more familiar, and more concerned about your happiness than our young acquaintance might warrant, you will forgive me."

"Kindness needs no forgiveness, my noble lord," replied Adelaide, thinking she remarked something peculiar in the Prince's tone, she knew not well what.

"Yes, for it may sometimes seem impertinent," answered Count Frederick. "But methinks, my child, if I can read the clear book of your eyes aright, you are one who can see very speedily what are the motives of words or actions, which to some might seem strange. I am preparing you for the demeanor of an odd old man—but I think I have said enough."

"I do not know, my lord," said Adelaide,

casting down her eyes, in some doubt and confusion, "enough to awaken curiosity, but not to satisfy it."

"Perhaps not enough to win confidence," replied Count Frederick, "yet, as I never knew that it could be gained by words, I must leave deeds to speak for me, and will only tell you more, that I have seen and conversed with a dear friend of yours, and that if you should need, at any time, aid and protection, you will have it from Frederick of Leiningen."

"A friend of mine?" said Adelaide, in surprise.

"Yes, indeed," replied her companion, "and a good friend too, who told me that a time was coming when you might need support; and I promised to give it. But I must hear more myself before I can speak farther. In the mean time, keep what I have said to your own bosom, but trust me as far as you will, when you have need.—What is it now, Herr von Narren?" he continued, as his jester

approached him. "What is it that you want?"

"What do I want?" said the man in motley, "Good faith! uncle Frederick, my answer, to be pertinent, must be as long as a dictionary. First, I want lands and lordships, and a purse well stored; then, I want wit—at least, so men tell me; and I myself judge that I want a pretty wife. Sure, I ought to have one or the other, though both cannot go together, for a pretty wife takes away a man's wit, and a man who has wit has not a pretty wife; then I want boots of untanned leather broidered with gold, and a well-darned doublet, which the air of heaven knoweth right well I have not got. Give you good luck, fair lady; are you the daughter of this castle?"

"I am the daughter of its lord," replied Adelaide, with a smile.

"Then you are the daughter of the castle," answered the jester, "and its only begotten child!"

"How do you prove that, Herr von Narren?" asked Count Frederick, seeming to enjoy very much the man's dull jokes.

"Now cogitate," replied the jester. "Is not the castle made of stone?—all lord's hearts are made of stone, too. He is the lord of the castle, and if she is the daughter of his heart, she is the daughter of a stone; the castle is made of stone, *ergo*, she is the daughter of the castle."

"It halts!—it halts!" cried Count Frederick; "your argument is lame of one foot!"

"My father's heart has never been of stone to me," replied Adelaide, gently.

"Perhaps you never cut it, or you would have found it so, pretty blossom," said the jester, more gravely than was his wont; and then turning to Count Frederick, he was about to continue in his usual strain, when their host entered, and in courteous terms, and with the ceremonious manners of the day, besought his noble guest to follow him to

the apartments which had been prepared for him.

Adelaide remained some minutes behind. I will not attempt to explain why; for ladies' thoughts and motives form a difficult book to read. It was certainly likely that Ferdinand of Altenburg would speedily return to the hall; and perhaps she might not be unwilling to see him again for a few minutes; or perhaps she might feel time hang heavy on her hands, as it often did in those old castles, and she be well disposed to while away a brief space in talking even with a jester. Let those who are wise in such things, judge. At all events, her conversation went on with Herr von Narren, as Count Frederick called him; and she it was who renewed it, saying,—

"You accompanied Count Frederick from the Holy Land, I think?"

"No, lady, he accompanied me," answered the jester; "fools always lead the way, you know, and wise men follow."

"But there was nothing foolish in coming back to your native country," said Adelaide.

"If it was wise to go, as all men said," replied the jester, "it was foolish to come back. But rats will put their heads into a trap, and then strive to pull them out, too late. Is your ladyship fond of strawberries and cream?"

"Not extravagantly," answered Adelaide.

"Then God give you such wise economy in all things!" cried the jester. "Even love may surfeit, if we take too much of it."

From some internal emotion, the blood rose in the lady's cheek, whether she would or not, but she forced herself to reply,—"Nay, I doubt that, sir; 't is when we love unwisely that there is danger. We cannot love too well when we love wisely."

"Well cannot be ill, indeed," said the fool, with a sage look, "so says Aristotle, or I mistake; yet I have heard my grandmother declare, and she was as wise as the old Greek, that all sweet things will surfeit. Now love

is a sweet thing to all young hearts; and were I a boy in the castle, I would avoid that pantry, for it may contain dangerous dainties."

Adelaide mused for a moment, asking herself whether the man, indeed, spoke at random; but when he saw that she replied not, he went on,—"Beauty, wisdom, wit, policy, a soft voice, and a delicate step—even chalked soles and a flat heel—never yet kept a man from stumbling, if he ran too fast; and so, fair lady, as you are the daughter of the castle, and I am Count Frederick's fool, we will go gently, and not fall in love with each other, lest our fortunes should be made a ballad of."

"I should think there was no great chance of your falling in love with me, good sir," answered Adelaide; "'tis a danger easily eschewed."

"Faith, I know not that, if you look out of the upper windows so sweetly," replied the jester, pointing towards Adelaide's eyes; "I am more in love already than I ever thought

to be with one of your house. If young hearts are like dry wood, why should not old ones be tinder?"

The lady was saved the necessity of replying, by her father's entrance; and she was not disinclined to break off a conversation which had become embarrassing. Retiring then quickly, she sought her own chamber, traversing the passages and corridors now crowded with men carrying up the baggage which had been brought with Count Frederick's train.

CHAPTER XI.

The crescets and sconces were lighted in the great hall, and all those who were to be honoured with a seat at the banquet of the evening were beginning to assemble in the lesser hall. On this occasion, none were admitted to the table of their lords but such as could either show some claim to noble blood, or were distinguished by particular favour. Nevertheless, the guests were very numerous, for the changes which time had produced in the strict feudal system, and in the severity of the ancient chivalry, admitted many to distinction who would formerly have been excluded; and every man, not absolutely a serf, was looked upon as noble, and entitled to bear arms. Priests and

friars, whether they could prove their ancestry or not, found ready admission to the tables even of monarchs; and in times of need and danger, when it was necessary to court popular support, the leaders of the free communes were treated with every sort of honour. The feudal system, indeed, at this time, may be said to have been completely disorganised; and amongst many symptoms of the total overthrow which was approaching, was that mixture of classes, and the reverence for a great many qualities, some of them much superior to mere ancestry, and some of them perhaps inferior. However that may be, the number of those who, notwithstanding all customary limitations, were entitled to dine with the Count of Ehrenstein and his princely guest, did not amount to less than seventy; and Adelaide, when she entered the lesser hall with her father, felt her heart beat somewhat timidly at the sight of so many who were perfect strangers to her.

It was to be remarked that amongst the various groups which the room contained, the

attendants of the lord of Ehrenstein looked grave, moody, and anxious, while those of Count Frederick of Leiningen, not aware of any cause for apprehension, were cheerful, if not merry. Numbers, however, have a very encouraging effect; and with so many companions around them, old Sickendorf and Mosbach, with their fellow-soldiers of the castle, had screwed their courage to the sticking point, and were prepared to face the ghosts of the old hall without any external signs of fear. It had cost some trouble, indeed, to get the cooks and sewers of the household to place the viands for the supper on the tables, but the example of Ferdinand and Adelaide, and the knowledge that they, with Franz Creussen and his boy, had passed the whole morning in the hall without disturbance, induced them rather to risk a meeting with the ghosts than to encounter their lord's anger; and in parties of five and six, they had at length ventured in, heavily laden with provisions.

Their terrors had caused some delay, how-

ever; and it was not till the Count had waited impatiently for near a quarter of an hour, that the trumpets were heard sounding clear and shrill from below. After a few moments wasted, as was customary, to show that no one was in haste, Count Frederick offered his hand to Adelaide, and led her to the door, and the whole party moved forward towards the banquet room.

"Let the others go first, Mosbach," said Sickendorf, in a low tone; "the devil may take them all, if he likes, so that he leave me enough for supper: I am as ravenous as a wolf!"

"So am I," answered Mosbach; "but I would rather go hungry to bed than sup in that dreary old hall, with the ghastly company we are likely to have."

The sight that met their eye, however, when they approached the great door, was one that they little expected. The whole hall was in a blaze of light; tapers were hung thickly on the walls and in the arches, showing forth, in

fine relief, the garlands of flowers with which Adelaide had decked them, and the branches of evergreen which both tapestried and canopied the hall. The banners, freed from the dust of many years, waved gaily over head; the tables groaned with well-cooked viands, and long ranges of cups, goblets, and tankards, in gold and silver—for the Count had brought forth all his stores of splendour—flashed back the rays of the lights around, and added to the rich and cheerful aspect of the whole.

Count Frederick paused for an instant, exclaiming,—"Why, this is a scene of fairy land!" and the Count of Ehrenstein himself gazed round with wonder and pleasure on a sight which far surpassed his previous expectations. He made no observation, however, but moved on to take his seat in the great chair, in the centre of the cross table, and several minutes were spent in arranging the guests according to their rank and station. Adelaide was placed upon her father's left, Count Frederick on his right; the priest sat next the lady,

and then the knights around, while Ferdinand, in a courteous tone, assigned the jester a seat at the angle of the two tables, so that he could converse with his lord during their meal, according to custom, without being actually placed at the same table. This arrangement created much surprise amongst the followers of the house of Ehrenstein, and some displeasure, but the attendants of Count Frederick seemed to look upon it as a matter of course.

Ferdinand himself was about to take a seat much farther down, but, as he moved towards it, the Count called him up, saying, "Here is room for you, Ferdinand. Well and faithfully have you done all that was entrusted to you, and neither a braver heart nor a better head have we amongst us. I name you the Master of my Household from this hour, and leave my good guests to your care and courtesy whenever I am not present."

"Well may he make him master of his household," said Sickendorf, in a whisper, to Mosbach, "for he seems master of the

spirits as well as the bodies. I am sure without their help he never could have done all this."

"He had Franz Creussen with him," mumbled Karl of Mosbach; "and I don't see why a boy like that, not knighted yet, should be put over our heads."

"He's a good youth, he's a good youth," answered Sickendorf; "and may well have an office that neither you nor I could manage. We are over *his* head in arms, and that is all we have to care about."

In the mean while Count Frederick had put some question to his entertainer, who bowed his head, replying, "Yes, the same, Ferdinand of Altenburg," and the old nobleman instantly rose up, as Ferdinand advanced with some degree of diffidence, and took him in his arms, saying, "Ah! good youth, I am right glad to see you. I knew your father well, a gallant gentleman as ever drew a sword. He died in foreign lands, many long years ago. We must know each other better, my son. Here, Philip

of Wernheim, I pray you for this night make room for him beside me."

"Nay, my good lord," said Ferdinand; "I beseech you excuse me—I must not displace a noble gentleman so much older and better than myself."

"There, sit you down, boy," cried the bluff old soldier, to whom the Count had spoken, taking him by the shoulder and thrusting him into the seat, with a laugh, "It matters not where a man sits. If he have honour, he will carry his honour about with him; if he have none, he may well sit low. I will go place me by my old friend, the Herr Von Narren, and see whether his sharp wit will crack my hard skull."

Thus saying he moved round, and took a seat at the other side of the cross table, saying to the jester, in a low tone, as he sat down, "Why, how now, you seem dull, mein Herr, cheer up."

The jester suddenly raised his face, and answered, "What makes a cat mew and a lion

roar—a young man fierce and an old man dull?—Hunger, hunger, Sir Philip! Heaven send the good priest a weak breath and a strong appetite, for he is rising to bless the meat, I see, and if he be long about it, like the grace of many another man, it will be a curse instead of a blessing."

The priest, however, was as hungry as the rest, and his words quick and few. The meal began, and for well nigh half an hour it passed nearly in silence, but then, as the appetite was assuaged, and wine began to flow, the tongue was allowed time to act as well as the teeth; and Count Frederick began to urge the jester to speak, though the latter, either from not having yet satisfied his hunger, or perhaps from weariness with long travel, seemed little disposed to indulge his lord.

"Come, come, my friend," cried Count Frederick, at length; "thou art playing the silent counsellor to night,—what dost thou cogitate?"

"Bitter sweet," answered the jester. "Call

you me counsellor, uncle? I would give you all right good advice and sharp, if you would but take it—man, woman, and child."

"Let us hear, let us hear," cried Count Frederick; "then will we judge whether it be worth the taking. Begin with the lady, cousin, as in duty bound."

"Well, then, here's for her counsel," said the jester, laying his finger on his brow:—

THE JESTER'S ADVICE TO LADIES.

"Flaunt not your beauty in the common eye,
Lest, like hedge flowers, it be not thought worth plucking,
Trust to no young man's tender word or sigh,
For even pigs are gentle when they're sucking.

Judge of your lover by his deeds to others,
For to yourself he's ever a deceiver.
Mark, girls, your fathers' conduct to your mothers,
And each be, if she can be, a believer."

"Good counsel, cousin! good counsel!" cried Count Frederick, "but now for another. What say you to the young men?"

"Good faith! uncle, I know not that I have

anything to say," answered the jester; "for whatever age says, youth will not believe, and whatever wisdom advises, folly will not follow; grace has gone out of season with garden rue; and wit, as well as wisdom, has become the property of fools. Argue me now wisely, with a sleek young crimson-spotted trout, upon the eminent perdition which befalls him if he snaps at a gay-looking fly with a hook in its belly; yet will your trout leap at the bait, and soon be flapping his broad tail on the bank. If the hook break in his jaws, indeed, he will gain wit from his wound, and look before he leaps another time—experience is the scourge that drives us all, admonition but a fool's blown bladder, that makes a sound where it strikes, but no impression. Boys will after their own game, as a goshawk after a partridge—and a pretty pair of heels, or a small delicate hand, most kissable and sugary, rosy lips set in a white skin, like strawberries in cream, and eyes that say 'Come, love me,' will any day, about feeding time, make a lad

like that jump at a hook that will draw him into the frying-pan. Heaven help and mend us all!

> Beauty's a butterfly, and youth 's a boy,
> Let him catch it if he can.
> When he casts away his toy,
> He may learn to be a man."

"Pretty Mistress Bertha would n't thank him if she could hear that," said Sickendorf, apart to his fellow-knight.

"Mistress Bertha!" answered old Mosbach. "I 've a notion the young cockerel carries his eyes higher than that, and all this notice of him will spoil him. The other day I saw him looking into the Lady Adelaide's eyes, and she into his, as if they were drinking love pledges to one another."

"Pooh! nonsense," answered Sickendorf. "You are always finding out a nest of cock's eggs, Karl. Have you nothing to say to us, Sir Jester?" he continued aloud, speaking across the table.

"Good faith! but little," answered the other;

"your old man is worse to deal with than your young one, for he is as weak in the wit as in the hams, and his brain, like a worn horse-trough, is ever leaking with watery talk.

Graybeards and wisdom were married one day;—
'T is a very long time since then—
But they parted by chance upon the highway
And ne'er came together again.

Leave wine, and leave women, graybeard, and leave oaths,
Leave dicing, and jesting, and scoffing;
And thou'lt find thine old wife, dressed in her best clothes,
At thy long journey's end—in the coffin."

"There Sickendorf," cried the Count of Ehrenstein, "you have enough, methinks. For my part, I will not tempt our friend."

"Then you shall have counsel without asking," answered the jester, and he went on in his usual rude verse as follows:—

"The noble lord, the just, the true—
Methinks I see him now—
Claims from no vassal more than due—
But gives him more, I trow.

No stolen swine grunts in his sty,
  No plundered goose complains,
No cackling hens against him cry,
  His barn no spoil contains.

Quick he restores what's wrongly got,
  Without a suit at law,
His sword has never cut a knot,
  His fingers could not draw.

If such thou art, no danger dread,
  In camp, in court, in town,
But if thou 'rt not, beware thy head,
  For sure thou 'lt tumble down."

At the first stanza the Lord of Ehrenstein smiled pleasantly, but as the jester went on to paint a character, which by no stretch of human vanity he could attribute to himself, his laugh grew somewhat grim, and although all the customs of the day required that he should seem amused with the jester's observations, even when they hit him the hardest, yet he might have made a somewhat tart reply in the shape of a joke, which he was very well qualified to do, if he had not been

interrupted before he could speak. Just as the jester concluded, however, a loud, wild, extraordinary burst of martial music drowned every other sound at the table: clarions and trumpets, drums and atabals, sounded all round the hall, in a strain so peculiar, that ears which had once heard it, could never forget it again. Count Frederick started, and turned towards the Count, exclaiming, "Odds life! we are in Africa again. Whence got you this Moorish music, my lord? I have not heard the like since I was at Damietta. You must have a whole troop of Moslema."

The Count's cheek had turned very pale, and Ferdinand's eye was seen wandering round the hall, as if expecting some strange sight suddenly to present itself.

"In truth, I know not whence these sounds come," answered the Count, after a moment's pause for consideration; and he then added, seeing that any further attempt at concealment would be vain, "It is no ordinary place, this castle of Ehrenstein, my noble friend. We

have strange sights, and strange sounds here. But what matters it? We are not men to be frightened by unsubstantial sounds or appearances either. I drink to your health," and filling his cup high with wine, he said aloud—the music having by this time ceased, "To Count Frederick of Leiningen!"

His guest immediately answered the pledge, saying, "Health to the Count of Ehrenstein!" but instantly a loud voice echoed through the hall, pronouncing in a solemn tone, "Health to the Dead!"

"This is mighty strange!" exclaimed Count Frederick, setting down his cup scarcely tasted. "Methought I had seen or heard all of wonderful that this earth can produce, but now I come back to my own land to witness things stranger still.—This must be Satan's work. We must get you, good father, to lay this devil."

"Please you, my noble lord," replied the priest, whose face had turned as white as paper, "I would rather have nothing to do

with him. There is the Abbey hard by, surely the good fathers there could keep the place free from spirits if they liked it.—It is their business, not mine, and as I see the lady is rising, by my troth, I will go to bed too, for I am somewhat weary with our long marches."

"It may be better for us all to do so, too," said Count Frederick; but his host pressed him to stay longer so earnestly, that he sat down for a few minutes, while Adelaide and the priest retired from the hall. The retainers of the two noblemen did not venture to follow their own inclinations and the priest's example, but, though the lord of Ehrenstein pressed the wine hard upon them, all mirth was at an end, and whispered conversations alone went on, except between the two counts, who spoke a few words from time to time, in a louder tone, but evidently with a great effort, and at the end of about a quarter of an hour, during which there was no further interruption, Count Frederick rose,—begging his entertainer to excuse him, for retiring to rest.

All were eager to rise, and to get out of a place where none of them felt themselves in security; but Ferdinand touched his lord's arm, as, with a gloomy brow, he was following his guest from the hall, saying, in a low voice, "What is to be done with all this gold and silver, my lord? we shall never persuade the sewers to clear it away to-night."

"I know not," answered the Count, moodily, but aloud. "You must lock the door, or stay and watch."

Ferdinand fell back, and suffered the stream to pass by him, meditating thoughtfully upon how he should act. As was not uncommon in those days, there was a good deal of confusion in his mind in regard to matters of superstitious belief. Persons of strong intellect, however rude the education which they had received, were not easily induced to suppose that beings merely spiritual could have the powers and faculties of corporeal creatures, and although few doubted the fact of apparitions being frequently seen, and even heard to speak, yet they

did not believe in general that they had any power of dealing with substantial bodies. Thus, when Ferdinand thought of the events of the preceding night, although he could not doubt the evidence of his own senses, yet the fact of the banner having been changed puzzled him a good deal, and in his straightforward simplicity he asked himself, "If ghosts can carry away so heavy a thing as a banner and a banner pole, why should they not take silver tankards and golden cups?" He looked at the different articles that strewed the tables with a doubtful eye, at first proposing to move them to a safer place himself, but upon the cross table were many large silver plates and dishes loaded with fragments of the meal, and he felt a repugnance to undertake for any one an office unsuited to his birth. To lock the door and leave the things to their fate, he could not help thinking might be merely consigning the valuable stores that were there displayed to a place from which they were never likely to return—whether above the earth or under the earth, he

did not stop to inquire—and at length, after a little hesitation, he said, "I will stay and watch. They did me no harm last night, why should they harm me to-night? I can rest here as well as in my bed, and I should like to see more of these strange things.—They are awful, it is true; but yet, what has one to fear with God and a good conscience,—I will stay."

Just as he came to this resolution, he heard a returning step in the vestibule, the door leading to which had been left open behind the retreating crowd, and the next minute the face of the jester appeared looking in. "Ha, ha! good youth," he said; "are you going to stay here, like a bait in a rat-trap, till our friends the ghosts come and nibble you? I heard what your excellent, good lord said,—a wise man! an admirably wise man! who understands the craft of princes, and leaves his followers a pleasant choice, in which they are sure to get blame or danger, in whatever way they act. What do you intend to do? lock up the door

and leave the cups and tankards for devils to drink withal? or to wait and bear them company, if they choose to come and have a merry bout with you?

"I shall stay and watch," answered Ferdinand; "I am not a steward or a scullion, to move plates and dishes, and if I leave them here Heaven only knows where they will be to-morrow!"

"Then, good faith! I 'll stay and watch with you, Sir Ferdinand," answered the jester; "two fools are better than one, at any time, and one by profession and one by taste ought to be a match for a score or two of spirits, whether they be black, white, or grey."

"I 've a notion, Herr Von Narren," answered Ferdinand; "that you have less of a fool in you than many who would be more ashamed of the name."

"Good lack!" answered the jester, "you do my wit but little justice, youth. Who would not be a fool, when wise men do such things every day. Better to profess folly at

once, of your own good will, than to have other men put the cap upon your head. A fool has one great advantage over a wise man which no one will deny him—a fool can be wise when he pleases, a wise man cannot be foolish when he likes. Oh! the bauble for ever; I would not change my motley just yet for a robe of minever. But we 'll watch, we 'll watch, and we 'll make ourselves comfortable too. By my faith! it gets cold of nights, or else the chilly wing of another world is flapping through this old hall. Go, get some logs, good youth, and we 'll have a fire then; with our toes upon the andirons, and our chins in our palms. By the beard of St. Barnabas, we 'll tell old stories of strange things gone by, till the cock shall crow before we know it. You are not afraid to leave me with the tankards, I suppose, for, on my life, I drink fair with every man, and have no itch for silver."

"Oh no, I do not fear," answered Ferdinand, "and I 'll soon bring logs enough for

the night. A cheerful blaze will do us no harm, and I shall be glad of your company."

Thus saying, he left the place, and from the great coffer at the entrance of the lesser hall, he soon loaded himself with sufficient wood, as he thought, to last the night. When he re-entered the great hall, he found the jester walking back from the other end towards the centre, where the fireplace stood; and as he came near, the young man inquired, "Were you talking to yourself just now, Herr Von Narren?"

"Nay, good sooth, that were waste of words," answered the jester. "I was peeping through yonder keyhole, and as it is a mighty ghostly looking door, I thought I might as well tell the spirits not to disturb us, as we had much to talk about. They took it all in good part, poor things, and said nothing; though after all it would be but charity to let them come and have a warm at our good fire, for it must be cold down stairs, I fancy, and your ghost is thinly clad. Where does yon door lead to, good youth?"

"To the serf's burying vault," answered Ferdinand, "and then to the old chapel under the new one."

"Ha, ha! all convenient for the ghosts," said the jester, "but there must be a number of sad Turks amongst them to make such a noise with their atabals as they did to-night. There, you reach me down a lamp, while I lay the sticks. Trust a fool for making a fire, if he do not make it too large: then he may burn his own fingers, and the house too. We will put out half the sconces, and so we shall have candlelight till the morning, when the sun and the tapers may wink at each other, like merry maids upon a May-day."

The fire was soon lighted, and the suggestion regarding the sconces carried into execution; after which, Ferdinand and the jester drew two stools into the wide chimney, and the latter bringing the large flagon of wine and two cups from the cross table, set the beaker down upon the hearth, saying, "We will drink and keep our spirits up."

"Nay," answered Ferdinand, "I want no wine for that purpose. I will take one cup, for I have had none to-night, and I have worked hard during the day, but if I took more, I should sleep and not watch."

"Ay, young brains are soon addled, like a pigeon's egg," answered the jester. "And so you are Ferdinand of Altenburg?"

Ferdinand nodded his head, answering, with a smile, "No other."

"You are a bold man," said his companion, "to give me such an answer."

"How so?" demanded Ferdinand, "I must surely know who I am myself."

"If you know yourself, you are the first man that ever did," replied the jester. "Your father was a proper man."

"Indeed! did you know him?" exclaimed Ferdinand.

"Oh, dear no, not at all," said the Herr Von Narren, "but my uncle Frederick told us so at supper. I knew your grandfather and your great-grandfather, and I was distantly related

to his great-grandfather; for as Adam was the first of my ancestors, and all his race sprang from Eve, there was some connection between us, either by blood or matrimony—Do you remember your father?"

"No," answered Ferdinand, "I was but a mere boy when he died."

"Ay, then you were not long acquainted," said the jester. "I remember mine quite well, and how he used to tickle me with his beard—that's longer ago than you recollect, or than you could if you would, for to ask you for a long memory in your short life, would be like putting a gallon of wine into a pint stoup—But I'll tell you a story, cousin."

"What is it about?" asked Ferdinand, drinking some of the wine out of the cup he held in his hand. "Is it a story of faërie, or about the Saracens, or of knightly deeds here in our own land?"

"A little of all, a little of all, cousin," answered the jester. "It's a Saturday's stew, containing fragments of all things rich and

rare, with a sauce of mine own composing. Now listen and you shall hear. Once upon a time there was a prince—we'll call him prince for want of a better name; without offence too, for a prince may be a gentleman sometimes—well, this prince lived at ease in his own land—for you see he had neither wife nor child to vex him—and a very merry prince he was. Well might he be so, too, for everybody did just what he liked, and he drank the best wine and ate the best meat, and slept upon good goose-feathers which he had not the trouble of plucking; and then, moreover, he had a jester who was fit to make any heart gay. Besides this jester, he had a brother, a wise man and a thoughtful, full of all sorts of learning; for they wished to make a bishop of him, but he loved the sword better than the coif, and all he learned in the convent was Latin and Greek, and reading and writing, and Aristotle, and Duns Scotus, and to love nobody better than himself."

"Ha!" exclaimed Ferdinand, beginning to

think that he perceived some drift in the man's tale, but he made no observation, and the jester continued.

"Well, the prince loved his brother very much, and they lived together in the same castle, and passed their time pleasantly; they hunted together, and they made a little war, and then they made a little peace; and while the men at arms played at mutton-bones in the court-yard, the two lords played at chess in the hall—and I can tell you, that though the brother won the first game, the prince won the second, and the jester stood by and laughed. Merrily passed the time, and if men would but be contented in this world, life would be like a summer day, but the brother was always urging the prince to this war or that, for the glory of their house, as he called it; and sometimes he went himself, and sometimes he stayed at home to take care of the castle, while the prince followed his advice; and then the brother one day thought it would

be a good thing for the prince to go and visit Jerusalem, and that it would be honourable, as he knew something of hard blows and of leading armies, to help the knights hospitallers and other sagacious men who were fighting for the pure pleasure of the thing, to get lands which they could not keep when they had got them. And the prince thought it a very good plan; and as he had got a great number of chests full of money, he went away to sow it in the fields of Syria, and to see if it would grow there. As he had a multitude of stout young men, too, who always required bleeding in the summer time, he took them with him, but as his brother was of a cold constitution, he left him at home to keep house. Now the prince having neither wife nor child, his dear brother was his heir."

"I see," said Ferdinand. "Go on, Herr!"

"Before they went," continued the jester, "the brother had a good deal of talk with some of the prince's followers, and told them

how much he loved their dear lord. He did not say that he wished him dead; oh dear, no, that was not the way at all; but he told them all that he would do if he were prince, and how he would promote them, and left Sir Satan, the king of all evil imaginations, to deal with their consciences as he might find expedient. Well, the prince went away, and took with him his jester as his chief counsellor, though he never took his counsel either, for if he had he would have staid at home. But so they went on up by the Boden Sea, and then by the Vorarlberg and through the Tyrol, kissing the Emperor's hand at Inspruck, and then came to Venice, and there they had an audience of the Duke; and at Venice they staid a long time, for there was a fair Venetian lady that the prince loved passing well—" and the jester paused, and gazed thoughtfully into the fire for several moments.

"That has nothing to do with my tale, however," he continued, at length. "The prince

went on, and after long journeying, he came to the place whither he was going; and though it was once a land flowing with milk and honey, very little honey and no milk was to be found there then. So, to keep down their appetites, he and his followers took to fighting in real earnest; one day, however, a certain officer of the prince, and a great friend of his brother's, brought him word that there were a number of Moslem in a valley not far from the castle where they were, and that if he would go out with his men, while the knights of the hospital guarded the castle, he might have them all as cheap as gudgeons. The prince had some doubts of his friend, and sent out for better intelligence, but finding that all that he said seemed very true, he got upon horseback, and sallied forth with his people. About three or four miles from the castle, however, he was suddenly surrounded and attacked on all sides by a number of the Moslem, of whom his officer had quite forgotten to tell him, though they had been

watching there since daybreak. Nevertheless he fought tolerably well, considering he was a prince, and he and his men might perhaps have got out of the trap, by the force of impudence and a strong arm, if his friend the officer had not come behind him just then and struck him a gentle stroke, with something sharp, in the neck, about the place where the gorget joins the cuirass. Upon that the prince incontinent tumbled headlong off his horse; the Moslem closed in on all sides, and with their sharp scimeters sent the heads flying about like pippins shaken off a tree. All were killed or taken except one, who got through and galloped away, first carrying the news of the defeat to the knights of St. John in the castle, and then to the prince's brother at home."

"This was of course the traitor who murdered his lord," exclaimed Ferdinand, who had listened with ever-growing interest.

"Oh dear, no," replied the jester; "his friends the Moslem kept him, but thought he

would be safer in two pieces, and so they separated his head from his shoulders."

"A very wise precaution,' answered Ferdinand, "the true way of recompensing traitors. And what became of the jester? He was taken prisoner, I suppose?"

"Yes, he was," answered his companion. "But now listen; I am coming to the most curious part of my story, and that is the history of the prince's followers after they were dead. One clear, moonlight night, I have heard say, just as they were all lying in the rocky valley, where they had fallen, and their bones, well picked by the wild beasts of that country, were shining white amongst the bushes and large stones, there came suddenly amongst them a tall thin figure, like a shadow on the wall, through which you could see the rocks, and the branches, and the round-faced moon, just as if it had been the horn-plate of a lantern; and it stooped over the bones, and looked at them, and counted them one by one, and then it said to each fleshless head, sepa-

rately,—'The man whose insinuations brought about your death, has strangled me in the vaults of his castle, though he knew that I was innocent. Rise up, then, all that were true to their prince, and come, let us to his brother's house, and plague him night and day,—at his board, and in his bed. Let us give him no rest so long as he remains upon the earth!'

"The moment he had spoken, slowly rising out of the ground, came a number of thin, shadowy figures, like himself, and they mounted calmly into the air, and floated away towards this land, just as you see a cloud rise out of the west, and soar slowly along, casting a shadow as it flies. Where they went to, and what they did, let the wise say; I know not. Only this I know, and that I heard from one who saw it, that the prince's followers, a great many years after they were killed and lying on the dry Syrian ground, rose up, man by man, each just like his own living self, and came away to their own land to torment their good lord's bad brother. One, indeed, remained

behind, but he was the man who smote his prince in the neck when he was contending with the infidels; but doubtless the Moslem pickled him, for he was worth preserving, and salt meat keeps better than fresh, you know, Sir Ferdinand."

CHAPTER XII.

FERDINAND'S teeth were set hard, and his hands clasped tight together as the jester's story ended, and for a moment or two he did not speak; but at length he inquired, "And how long was it ago that the good lord fell?"

"Oh, a long while," answered his companion, "long enough for young men to grow old, and for old men to wither and rot. Some twenty years ago or more. Lackaday how few twenties there are in life. Twenty and twenty are forty, and twenty are sixty: how few see the fourth twenty! Who sees the fifth? The first begins in the infant, with a passion for milk; all mouth and no wit; and ends in the youth with a love for

sweet ankles and for cherry lips; all heart and no brains. The second starts on his course like a swallow catching insects, and ends like a slough-hound upon the track of a deer: ambition flies before and distances him still. Then begins another twenty, with the hard brain and the hard heart; your man of manifold experiences, who finds no pleasure in pippins, and is mailed against the darts of a dark eye. He must have solid goods, forsooth! and so chooses gold, which will not decay; but, good faith! it matters little whether it be the possession which decays, or the possessor, whether the gilded coin rots, or the fingers that clutch it: the two part company all the same. Then comes the fourth twenty, often begun and seldom ended; and we go creeping backward, as if we would fain run away from the other end of life; toys please us, straws offend us; we stumble at the same mole-hills that tripped up our infancy. Time rubs off from the score of memory what experience had written; and when the sorrowful soft gums

have eaten their second pap, death takes us sleepy up and puts us quietly to bed. It was twenty years ago, good youth, — ay, that it was,—and twenty years is one of those strange jumps that are more wisely taken backwards than forwards."

"Methinks," said Ferdinand, "that though the time is so long, I know something of this story, too,—" But before he could add more, a slight sort of creaking noise was heard proceeding from the end of the hall, near the chair of state. Ferdinand, whose face was already in that direction, and the jester who suddenly turned round, saw the small door which has been so often mentioned open slowly, exposing the mouth of the passage beyond.

"Ah, who have we here?" cried the jester. "Some of our friends from over the sea, I suppose;" but no one appeared, and all was silent. Both the watchers rose, and gazed for a minute or two towards the door; Ferdinand grasping the cross of his sword, but

the jester showing no sign either of alarm or surprise.

"By my faith!" he exclaimed, at length, "I will see what is beyond, there. Will you come with me youth, or shall I go alone?"

"I should think from the tale you have told," answered Ferdinand, "that you know your way right well without guidance. But I will go with you, whatever is there—I have been once, and will not be stopped from going again."

"Come along, then," answered the jester. "Let us each take a lamp, cousin, for the dead must lack lights, as they always choose to walk in darkness. Why is a ghost like a flagon of wine?"

"Nay, I know not," answered Ferdinand, "and to say truth, I am in no jesting mood just now."

"Because it comes out of the vault at midnight," answered the jester, "and where it enters there it scatters men's wits about. Happy he who has none to scatter. But

come along, cousin, we'll soon see whether our spirits are equal to theirs—I feel rather queer, but a mole wouldn't mind it, for he's accustomed to holes in the earth."

Thus saying, he led the way to the door, and entered the long narrow passage, Ferdinand following, and each carrying a lamp. The jester's young companion, though busied with many other thoughts, watched his movements closely, in order to obtain a confirmation or refutation of the suspicions which his tale had excited.

Those suspicions, however, were strengthened by all that the young man remarked, "Damp, damp and chilly, as a rich man's heart," murmured the jester, as he advanced; and then, as if his knowledge of the passages which they were following was not of a few hours' growth, he laid his hand upon the door, at the farther end, and without hesitation drew it towards him, choosing at once the way which it really opened. He next passed on down the stone steps, without a moment's pause to consider, merely turning round and saying, "Take

care of your lamp, cousin, for a light extinguished in this world is not easily lighted again, whether it be love's lamp or life's. A puff puts them out, but a puff won't bring them in again. By the mass! the stones are somewhat slippery, and as much out of repair as a fool's head or a spendthrift's purse. I must mind my way; for here, as on ambition's ladder, a small slip would make a great tumble."

"By my faith! you seem to know your way right well, Herr Von Narren," said Ferdinand, "better than I do, methinks."

"Ay, ay, folly finds the straight road, while wisdom is looking for the short cut," answered the jester. "One can't well miss their way when there is but one. But there seem no ghosts here, except the spirit of Mistress Mildew, and she is very prevalent. We shall lose our time, and get no payment for chilling our bones, if we get no better apparition than this green slime. I would give a great deal to see a ghost. I never met with one in all my travels."

"Perhaps you may be gratified to-night," rejoined Ferdinand, "for here they wander, if anywhere."

"If anywhere!" exclaimed the jester, "did any one ever hear such heretical unbelief? We know that the church supports them, because, I suppose, the poor things are too thin and unsubstantial to stand of themselves. However, here we are at the bottom; praised be Heaven's mercy in not bringing us there sooner! And here is a door. Now, marry, you and other men of shrewd wits would doubtless be looking for another, but I take the one that stands before me, the sunshine of my darkness teaching me that that which is at hand is always nearer than that which is far off. Now let us see, it should be pulled this way, by the look of the lock and the hinges, but if it be locked, what then?" — and he paused for a minute or two, seeming to consider curiously the question before he proceeded to ascertain the fact.

"Come, come, Herr von Narren," said Ferdi-

nand, "you know it opens this way well enough, and doubtless it is not locked, and if it be, I have a key that will open it."

"What! then you come hither often," said the jester, "no wonder you are less afraid of haunted places than the rest."

"I do not come here often," said Ferdinand, somewhat vexed at the incautious admission he had made, "I have been here but once in my life before, and even that I do not wish mentioned," and stretching forth his arm, he pulled back the door, before which his companion was apparently inclined to hold a long parley.

"Bless the lad's heart!" cried the jester, "he seems to think that his light words will stay in a fool's head for an hour. My brain is not bird-lime, boy, to catch your fluttering things, and put them in the trap. But now, what place is this?" and he took a step forward and looked round, holding up the lamp in his hand.

"This is the Serf's Burial-Vault," answered

Ferdinand, in a low voice, remembering, with a sensation of awe that he could not overcome, the strange and fearful sights which he had there beheld.

"Hold up your lamp," said the jester, in a grave tone, "I wish to see around me."

But the darkness, as before, was too thick to be pierced for any distance by the feeble rays of the two lamps, and the next moment, to his surprise, the young man heard his companion demand aloud, "Where art thou, Walter?"

"Here!" answered a deep tone instantly; and following the sound, the jester advanced direct towards the column, to which the skeleton was bound by the chain. There he paused, and gazed upon it, as if that had been the object he sought; and the emotions which he experienced, whatever they were, seemed to overpower him, and make him forget for the time the presence of his companion. His eyes filled with tears, "Honest, and faithful, and true," he cried, "and was this the fate

reserved for thee? All could be forgiven but this—This cannot, if there be justice on earth or in heaven," and bending down his head, he slightly raised the bony fingers in his own, and pressed his lips upon the mouldering joints.

There was a faint sound, as of sobbing loud, but Ferdinand's strange companion took no notice of it, and continued gazing upon the skeleton for several minutes, with a look of deep and intense thought in his eye, as it wandered up and down the fleshless limbs. Then suddenly turning away, he said, "Come on," and striding forward to the further side of the vault, he passed through the archway into the crypt or lower chapel. Taking no notice of several of the monuments on either side, and only giving a glance to the coffins, he went straight to the tomb of gray marble, on which was sculptured a lady in the attitude of prayer, and there kneeling for a few moments by the side, he seemed to busy himself in silent devotions. After which, rising he turned to Ferdinand, and

said, in a mild but no sportive tone, "It is done. Go back to the hall, good youth, and wait for me there. I will not be long, and nothing will annoy you by the way."

Ferdinand might think it all strange, but yet the words of his companion seemed to have a power over him which he could not resist, and turning back he retrod his steps to the hall, where, after having closed the door, he seated himself before the fire to wait for the jester's return.

Light-hearted youth, that season of great powers and small experiences, may feel strong and deep emotions, but their influence, on the corporeal frame at least, is not very permanent. Weary with a long day's exertion, and having had little rest for the three or four nights preceding, Ferdinand's eyes felt heavy; and that pleasant languor which precedes sleep stole over his limbs. He wished to remain awake; but yet he leaned back for support against the stone-work of the wide chimney; and in a few minutes he nodded, woke up again,

and then fell into sound slumber. He was awakened by a heavy hand grasping his shoulder; and looking round he saw the jester standing beside him, with the fire in its last embers, on the hearth, and the lamps burning dim.

"I must wake you, cousin," said his companion. "For we shall soon have Madam Morning winking at us with her old grey eye. Sleep is better than waking for some good reasons, but it must come to an end, coz!"

"Is it so late?" asked Ferdinand. "I thought that I had just closed my eyes!"

"Yes, that is the blessing of youth," said the jester; "he thinks not, either sleeping or waking. He dreams while he is waking, and forgets while he is sleeping, and therein has he the two best gifts that man can covet—to dream and to forget."

"I doubt not, from all I see," answered the young man, "that there are many things you would wish to forget, were it possible."

"Hark ye, cousin," said the jester; "one

thing we had both better try to forget, to-wit, that we have been in those vaults together. I have a secret of yours, you have one of mine. We will each keep what we have got, and give it away to nobody, for that would be thriftless."

"Nay, I have nought to tell," answered Ferdinand; "though perhaps something to inquire, Herr Von Narren. I may suspect, and I do; but I can do no more than suspect. But one thing I must ask; what you came here for? as I can know of no evil to my lord without preventing it, otherwise I am a traitor!"

"Why, what evil can I do?" asked the jester, with a smile; "what power have I? Is the fool's bauble equal to a baron's sword? Good faith! I will go to the wars, and turn out a great conqueror.—I intend your lord no harm, cousin."

"But you said there was something not to be forgiven," replied Ferdinand.

"Nor will it," said his companion, somewhat sternly; "if there be justice in Heaven; but to

Heaven I leave it; and in its own good time I doubt not to see vengeance fall where it ought. What is it that you suspect?"

"That you were the follower of the late Count of Ehrenstein," answered Ferdinand, frankly; "the jester you mentioned in the tale you told; and that even now you seek to revenge the Count's death."

His companion laughed aloud. "How thy wits jump!" he said; "but in one way, like an ill-broken colt, they jump too far. I seek not to avenge that Count's death; and by all that I hold sacred, I myself will never attempt it; so let that satisfy thee, good youth."

"And yet, perhaps, I ought to inform the Count of who you are;" replied the young man, thoughtfully.

"That you cannot do," answered the jester; "and if you believe that the tale I told applies to your lord and his brother, you neither will nor ought. Vipers have viper's eggs—rogues serve rogues; and the blood in your veins would cry out against you, if you were to

make your mind the bondsman of a felon. If you think my tale is true, quit this household in silence, for your own honour; if you do not believe the tale to be applicable here, remain in silence. But if you would needs speak, I will seal your lips with one word."

"Ay! what is that?" asked Ferdinand, in some surprise.

"Adelaide!" answered the jester, fixing his keen eyes upon him. "Is there nothing, good youth, that you seek to conceal as well as myself; nay, far more than I do? for I have nought to fear—you much. I care not; but that it would sadden merry meetings, and break off gay intercourse, if your good Count should know all that you know, and more.—Indeed, I promise you, that ere I depart from this neighbourhood, he shall hear the whole tale. He would less dare to wag a finger against me, protected as I am, than jump from the top of the keep; but I must choose my own time and my own way to speak, and it must not be now."

Ferdinand had coloured high when the name of Adelaide was pronounced, and now he remained silent while his companion went on in a tone so different from that which he generally used in his jester's capacity. An instant after, however, the other suddenly resumed his ordinary manner, and exclaimed, "So that is settled between the two fools who sat up all night watching for that which did not come.—Marry, had we liked it, cousin, we might have proved ourselves the wise men of the party; for with plenty of wine and good cheer, we had wherewithal to be merry and wise. Now, however, we are sorry fools; for we have neither emptied the flagons nor cleared the dishes, and vinegar will be cheap in the market if all that wine stands there much longer."

"It may serve as a bribe to bring some of the knaves in by daylight, to clear away the tables," answered Ferdinand. "There is more than one amongst them who would sell his own soul for a flagon of strong drink."

"Then is his soul dirt cheap, or a very bad

one," answered the jester; "but, on my life, I believe the market price of men's souls is half a florin; for day by day we see them sold for less. The twinkle of a girl's eyes is current coin against such commodities; the pottle-pot drives a thriving trade in the mart of spirits; and two small pieces of ivory spotted with black, have nearly emptied the world's fold of its true sheep. But there comes the morning. See the panes of glass in the casement are looking gray, we shall soon have the sun up, red and blear-eyed like a drunkard who has sat up all night with the stoup. I 'll hie me to bed, for my wit will want activity, and, good faith! it is getting somewhat weak in the knees."

"It must be a heavy task to be ever ready with a jest, even when the heart is sad," said Ferdinand.

"What! a heavy task to find light wit?" exclaimed the jester. "No, good youth; let a man but look at life as he ought, and the burden is easily borne. All things here are but jests; some sour, some sweet; some light, some heavy.

If we cannot laugh with, we can laugh at; and but get your wit into a cantering habit, and he 'll forget his grave paces and trip lightly along the road. Habit, habit, habit, cousin! everything is habit in this world. What is that makes the man eat what the child rejects? Custom. What makes us endure a load of clothes that Heaven never intended us to wear? Custom. Put a pair of tawny leather shoes upon a child's bare feet, and he will stumble over the rushes on the floor; yet, see how gaily the youth will trip along, as if he had been born into the world booted and spurred. The eye and the ear, the tongue and the nose, all have their habits. Go into a strange land, and you will split your sides at the odd dresses of the people. Stay there a year, and you will think your own countrymen as comical. The blast of the trumpet cracks a lady's ears; ask the knight and his war horse if ever they heard sweeter music. Good sooth! I do believe, if men ate dirt and ashes for a month, they would think them better than stewed ducks or a brawn's

head; and thus with me, though jesting be a sorry trade enough when the heart is full or the stomach empty, yet, either from lack of continence, or discretion, I began early, and now the jest always gets the better of the lamentation, and finds vent first. But look at the red light on the floor. It is time for night fowls to roost. Give you good morning, cousin Ferdinand, I am away to my pallet."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE morning was dull and heavy, though fully risen, when Ferdinand of Altenburg was summoned to the Count's chamber; but by that time he could bear the tidings to his lord that all had been cleared away from the hall at the sacrifice of the wine which had been left there.

"Enough was left, indeed, to render the knaves half drunk," he added; "but it had the effect of making them swear, by all they held sacred, that they will never shun the hall again, if it were haunted by whole troops of goblins."

"We shall not need to try them, Ferdinand," replied the Count. "We must change our plan, good youth. We must not have our food poisoned by doubts and fears."

The Count spoke thoughtfully, pausing when he had done; and Ferdinand replied, "I am glad you have taken such a resolution, my good lord. It is true, I fear these things not; but still it is high time that something should be done to inquire into this matter, or to remove it. You have yourself now heard, and I have seen strange things, of which, I trust, some holy man, some priest of a good and saintly life, may be able to free us."

"No, no," replied the Lord of Ehrenstein, "we will have no priests, lad, nor monks either. They can do nought in this or aught else, but in crafty policy, where the hundred-headed and perpetual monster sets all her everlasting wits to work. I know their ways right well, for I was bred to be one of them.—No, no! We will have no priests to meddle and to babble here, and tell the broad world that I was plagued with spirits at my very hearth. That were an old woman's remedy, and I will not submit myself to such were there none other in the world. Not so, not so will we set to work; but for the

future we will take our meals in separate parties: some in the lesser hall, some in the two rooms on either side—but what makes you look so dull, as if your mind were roaming to other things?—You were not disturbed, you say?"

"Oh no, my lord, this last night I saw nothing," answered Ferdinand; "but I am weary and feel heavy eyed, having slept but little for several nights."

"Well, hie thee to bed then for a while," replied the Count; but he was not yet satisfied; for there were signs rather of thought than of slumber in the young man's face; and with suspicions, aroused of he knew not well what, he resolved to watch him more carefully.

The day passed nearly without events. The whole party seemed relieved, when they found that the haunted hall was no more to be visited. The Count and his noble guest walked for a great part of the morning on the battlements, in earnest conversation; the knights and soldiers amused themselves with the sports and games of the day in the courts and chambers,

and the hour of noon brought with it the usual meal. During the whole morning, Adelaide and Ferdinand did not meet; and even at dinner, by the Count's arrangement, the young man was sent to superintend another room, where a table was spread for some of the chief officers of both households. One glance as he passed through the hall was all that he obtained, and he thought that Adelaide's eyes looked anxious. Count Frederick was standing on one side of the lady, and his young follower, Martin of Dillberg, on the other, as the lover crossed the hall; and on the face of Dillberg there were smiles and sweet looks, which made Ferdinand's breast feel warm with sensations he had never before experienced. Doubt or suspicion, in regard to Adelaide herself, he could not entertain; but yet jealousy has many stages, and Ferdinand hated Count Frederick's follower heartily from that moment. He felt—or fancied that they were rivals, and perhaps, in the whole range of bitter emotions, there is none more painful than that which we endure,

when we know that even for a time, a rival has the ear of her we love. At the meal, he tried to be cheerful as well as courteous, and though it cost him a great effort to conceal his uneasiness, yet his manner was so pleasing to all, that he rose high in the opinion of Count Frederick's train, and even at the table, almost within his own hearing, comparisons were made between him and Martin of Dillberg not very favourable to the latter.

"I love him not," said one; "I never have; and the more I see of him the less I like him. Were he like this young squire, one could understand our lord's favour for him."

"Ay," answered an elder man to whom he had been speaking, "our lord will rue that favour one of these days. He is cunning and false, ever making his own tale good, and seeking to injure others. I never saw one yet, who was so artful and malicious when he was young, that did not commit some treachery before he was old."

"Ay, the Count is beginning to know him, I

believe," rejoined the first, "saw you not how he chid him for the falsehood he told of Sigismond. He would have done better to send him away at once; but he bears with him because his father was a good soldier and an honest man."

"Ay, and his mother a devil incarnate," answered the other. "She broke his father's heart, betrayed his honour, and ruined him; and this youth is her very image."

In such comments, more than one at the table indulged very freely; but Ferdinand heard them not, for he was conversing somewhat eagerly with one of Count Frederick's younger knights, though the subject was of no greater interest than the history of the jester. Ferdinand sought for information to confirm or remove the suspicions he entertained, but he could obtain little, and indeed his companion did not seem disposed to communicate much. "I was with a different band," he said, in answer to one of the young man's questions, "when this man joined the Count."

"Then he did join him in the Holy Land?" asked Ferdinand.

"I believe so," was the reply, "but I know nought as certain. He might have known the Count before."

"I have heard he saved your leader's life," said the young man.

"Yes, so they say," rejoined the knight. "I was not present, and know nothing of it."

All further questions were equally fruitless, and Ferdinand turning the conversation to the subject which the others had been discussing, inquired, "Who is Martin of Dillberg, whom your lord seems also to love right well?"

"Nay, that is a mistake," answered the knight. "He shows him favour, it is true; but I have twice seen the question hang in the balance whether my lord would not strike his head off, once for taking a jewel off a dead man's hand, and once for betraying counsel. But he is as cunning as a fox, and raised a doubt, by one means or another, as to whether he did not intend to carry the ring to the widow. The

other fault was forgiven on the score of youth, but with a warning, that if he so offended again, death would be his doom without reprieve."

"Perchance he is valiant in arms," said Ferdinand; "I have ever heard that Count Frederick will forgive much to gallant men."

His companion smiled and shook his head, saying, "He is no great seeker of renown, this youth. Yet he is brave after a certain fashion too. There are some men, and he is one of them, who would risk ten times the danger of a battle-field, to accomplish a small matter cunningly. He seems to enjoy his own art so much, that if it costs his life he must practise it, especially if it be to the injury of others."

"A pleasant comrade in a band like yours," rejoined Ferdinand; and there the conversation dropped.

The meal was drawing near its conclusion, when some noise was heard in the adjoining hall, of a different kind from that which had preceded, though in those days, as often at

present, the hour of dinner was a noisy one. The Count of Ehrenstein's voice could be distinguished asking questions with angry vehemence, and every now and then another answering, while the tones of Count Frederick joined in from time to time even more sharply.

"What is the matter in there, Henry?" asked Ferdinand, as one of the sewers passed through, bearing some dishes.

"A party of Venetian traders, sir, have been stopped, and plundered beyond Anweiler," replied the man, "and it seems they had gold with them belonging to Count Frederick; so they have sent up to seek redress and help. One of them has been killed, they say."

"Who has done it?" asked the young gentleman. "I thought such bands had been put down."

"Oh, it is the Baron of Eppenfeld," said the sewer; "he will never give up that trade; and his place is so strong, it will be difficult to force him."

Thus saying, he went on, and the thoughts

of all present turned to the results that were likely to ensue from the event that had just occurred. "Count Frederick will not be long out of the saddle," observed one of his attendants; "it is not well to pull the beard of an old lion."

"I doubt we shall have enough here to right the affair," rejoined an old soldier; "it is unlucky that one-half of the band marched on."

"But the Count of Ehrenstein will not suffer his friend to go unaided," answered Ferdinand. "He can call out two hundred men at arms."

"That would indeed be serviceable," said the knight, "and doubtless he will do it; for I have heard that this gold belonged to the late Count, and was found safely treasured in a castle of the Knight's Hospitallers on the coast."

Ferdinand was about to answer, when old Sickendorf put in his head, exclaiming, "Here, here, Ferdinand, the Count would speak with you;" and instantly rising, the young man followed into the neighbouring hall. He found the two Counts apparently much excited, speak-

ing together eagerly, and a tall grave looking elderly man in foreign garments standing beside them, occasionally joining in their conversation, which went on for some time after Ferdinand of Altenburg had entered.

At length the Count of Ehrenstein turned towards him, saying, "Here is an occasion for you, Ferdinand. The Baron of Eppenfeld has waylaid these merchants on their way hither,—from good information of their coming it would seem, but how obtained, Heaven knows. He has seized all their baggage, and in it treasure belonging to me. It is judged but courteous to suppose that he is ignorant, that I am interested, and therefore, instead of going in arms to demand reparation at once, I send to claim that all be instantly restored to these noble merchants, and that compensation be given for the death of one of their valets and the wounds of another: that compensation to be awarded by myself and Count Frederick here. You shall be my messenger; take with you ten men at your choice,

and depart at once, so that you be back before morning. If Eppenfeld will restore all and make compensation, well; if not, defy him in my name and in that of Count Frederick. The task is one of honour, though of some danger; but I know it will not be less pleasant to you on that account."

"Thank you, my good lord," replied Ferdinand; "but let me know my errand fully." If the Baron seeks to delay his reply, how am I to act? It is now one of the clock, ride as hard as I will, I shall not reach his castle gates till five; and he may say that he will give me an answer in the morning."

"Stay not an hour," replied the Count. "I would not have you, or any of your troop, either break bread or taste wine within his gates, till the answer is given. If he says Yes, you may refresh yourselves and the horses. If he says No, return at once, and rest at Anweiler. If he seeks delay, give him half an hour, and tell him such are our express commands. Now away, good youth, to make ready. You must all go armed."

"I will do your will to the best, my lord," answered Ferdinand, and with a glance to the pale cheek of Adelaide, he was turning to leave the hall, when Count Frederick called him back, and drawing him to the window, said, in a low voice, "I would fain have you, my dear lad, discover, if possible, how this worthy knight obtained intelligence of the merchants' journey. I must leave the means to yourself; but I have my reasons for the inquiry—I fear this may be a dangerous expedition for you," he added.

"More full of danger than honour, my good lord," answered Ferdinand. "Small chance of fair fighting: much of being caught like a rat in a trap. But I will do my best, and have nought but to obey."

Thus saying, he left the hall, not daring to turn his eyes to Adelaide again; and the party he left soon broke up, Count Frederick saying he had a vow to perform at the chapel of the Virgin, and that he would ride out to fulfil it between that hour and supper time.

Choosing his men from those on whom he

could best depend, Ferdinand descended for a moment to the court, gave orders for the horses to be saddled, and all prepared without a moment's delay, and then mounted to his own chamber to arm himself in haste. He had nearly done, and heard gay voices speaking on the battlements far below, when some one knocked gently at his door.

"Come in," cried the young man; and Bertha appeared, with a face half frightened, half playful.

"Your lady wishes to speak with you for a moment before you go, Sir Scapegrace," said the girl in a low tone. "She is in the corridor below, and all the rest are out of the way for a minute or two, so make haste;" and without more words she hastened away, leaving the door ajar.

Ferdinand lost no time; but, as ever is the case when one attempts to abridge a necessary process, one thing went wrong, and then another, so that he was longer than he would have been had he been less in haste. At length, however, all was complete; and hurry-

ing down, he found Adelaide waiting anxiously near the door of her own apartments, with Bertha at a little distance towards the top of the great stairs. As soon as she saw him, the lovely girl sprang towards him.

"Oh, Ferdinand," she said, "I have longed to speak with you all the morning; but the castle has been so full, that it would have been madness to attempt it; and now you are going whence you may, perchance, never return. At all events, you cannot be back in time to do what is required."

"Fear not for me, dear one," answered Ferdinand, "neither imagine that I will linger for a moment by the way, if Adelaide has aught to command me."

"Nay, it is not I who command," replied his beautiful companion with a faint blush, "it is Father George who requires that you and I together shall be at the chapel to-night, some time between midnight and dawn."

"Indeed!" said Ferdinand, "does he explain for what object?"

"No. Three or four words written in a billet, closely sealed, were all the intimation I have had," answered Adelaide.

"And would you go if it were possible, dear girl?" inquired her lover.

"I will do whatever he directs," replied the lady.

"Then, if there be a means of any kind, I will be back;" said Ferdinand. "Do not retire to rest till all hope of my coming is over for the night; but, as perchance, I might be detained, it were better to send down Bertha to the good priest to let him know, that if not there to-night, we will come to-morrow night without fail, if I be alive and free."

As he spoke, Bertha raised her hand suddenly as a warning, and Adelaide was drawing back to her own apartments; but Ferdinand detained her, saying, "Do not seem alarmed—'tis our own hearts make us fear. I may well bid you adieu as I should any other lady;" and bending his head over her hand, he kissed it, saying aloud, "Farewell, lady—God shield you ever!"

"Farewell, Ferdinand," said Adelaide, in a tone that somewhat wavered; and, at the same moment, Bertha drew nearer, and Martin of Dillberg entered the corridor from the great stairs. His eyes were turned instantly towards the two lovers, and although Bertha was by this time close to them with waitingmaid-like propriety, yet the youth's lip curled with a smile, of not the most benevolent aspect.

"Farewell, pretty Bertha," said Ferdinand, as soon as he saw Count Frederick's follower; and then, passing him with very slight salutation, he hurried away, while Adelaide retired at once to her own chamber. The men and horses were not yet prepared; and as Ferdinand was standing armed in the court waiting for their appearance, the Count, with his guest, the priest, and the jester, passed by. The Count's eye rested on him, but he did not address him; and as the party walked on, the young man heard the Lord of Ehrenstein reply to some question of Count Frederick's; "Yes, he is always prompt and ready—brave as a lion, too,

fearing nothing, living or dead; but there has come over him to-day a sort of dull gloom which I do not understand."

Ferdinand heard no more; and in five minutes after he was in the saddle, and at the head of his troop, wending onward on his expedition. Crossing the valley, he followed the course of the opposite hills, as if he were journeying to Durkheim, till he had passed the Abbey about two miles, where a small village, commanding a beautiful view of the basin of the Rhine, presented itself; and turning through it to the right, he was pursuing his way, when a loud voice from a blacksmith's forge called him by name; and he checked his horse for a moment.

"Whither away, sir? whither away?" asked Franz Creussen, coming forth with his enormous arms bare to the shoulders.

"To Eppenfeld," answered Ferdinand, "the Baron has waylaid some merchants bringing gold to the Count; and I am sent to ask him to give it up,—I cannot stay to tell you more,

Franz, but doubt I may stay longer where I am going, and perchance need arms as strong as yours to get me out."

"Likely enough," replied the giant; "when come you back, if they will let you?"

"As fast as my horse can carry me," answered the young man, and galloped on, along one of the narrow hill paths that led towards Anweiler, with an unrivalled view of the whole Palatinate below him on the left, and, on the right, the mountains of the Haard, with their innumerable castles, abbeys, and monasteries, crowning every peak, and barring every gorge. When he reached the road from Landau to Zweibracken, near Anweiler, instead of following it far, he turned away again before he had gone on a quarter of a mile, in the direction of Wissenbourg, and entered a dark and gloomy looking valley, where rocks and trees were far more plentiful than churches or human habitations. Closing in on either side, the high hills left but a narrow space for the dell as it wound on, till at length, at a spot where the basin extended a little, a

tall rock rose up in the centre, covered with wood wherever the roots could find earth to bear them, and crowned with walls and towers above. Ferdinand gave his horse the spur, and in a few minutes more stood before the gates of Eppenfeld.

CHAPTER XIV.

Before the small chapel in the wood, below the castle of Ehrenstein, there was, as I have said, an open space of about half an acre. The trees encroached upon it here and there, rendering the boundary-line broken and irregular, detracting nought from the sylvan beauty of the scene. On the contrary, the variety was pleasant to the eye; and the old oaks and beeches, which, starting out before their fellows, obtruded on the soft dry turf, rendered the sight more agreeable by depriving it of all formality. It looked like a space for fairy revels; and in truth, though the fathers, if they had seen any of the little good people present, might have sent them roughly to some other quarters, took no slight

pleasure, as was commonly the case with the monks, in the charms of the spot where they had fixed one of their buildings, and would rather have forfeited a great deal than have cut down one of the trees which formed the great ornament of the place. The varied colours of the spring, the summer, and the autumn, afforded much delight to the good old men. The sunshine, streaming through the green leaves, was like the return of the summer of life to the winter of their age; and it was the boast of the Lord Abbot—though he was not otherwise than fond of venison—that neither stag, nor roe, nor fallow-deer, had ever been slaughtered in those woods by his command. Thus the wild creatures of the forest, who have more sense than we give them credit for, looked upon the wood, within two or three hundred yards of the chapel, as a place of refuge, a sort of sanctuary; and the open space between the trees and the building as a playground for their evening hours. The beams of the full day, however, were pouring over the

blades of grass, and tinging with bright yellow the beech leaves above, when Count Frederick of Leiningen, with a small party behind him, drew in his rein at the chapel door. A groom sprang to his stirrup, and, dismounting more lightly than from his age one would have judged possible, he entered the chapel and bent his knee for some moments before the altar, in prayer; then rising, he advanced towards the door of the little wing inhabited by Father George, and, after knocking at it with his knuckles, opened it and entered, beckoning the jester to follow. The good priest was seated at a table reading, but he rose, when, by air and manner, more than even by dress, he perceived the high rank of his visitor. For a moment or two neither of the three spoke, and the eye of the monk ran from the face of Count Frederick to that of the jester, resting upon the latter long and stedfastly, with a sort of inquiring look, as if he recognised features which he had seen in times of old, and yet had some difficulty in

assuring himself that they were the same which he had beheld before the scorching blast of time had passed over them.

Count Frederick was the first who spoke, saying, "You do not remember me, good father, though we have met often in early days, and more than once some ten years ago; but I can easily forgive your forgetfulness, for, good faith, the suns of Syria and Africa are not the greatest beautifiers of man's person, and the change must be somewhat rueful. You are little altered, since last I saw you; more silver than sable in your hair now, it is true, but still the features are the same."

"I remember you well, my good lord," replied the priest; "though you are greatly changed, I own. Yet here is one I should remember better, methinks; for, if my eyes deceive me not strangely, we have met more often;" and as he spoke he laid his hand upon the jester's arm.

"I know not which is the greatest deceiver," cried the jester, with a laugh; "a man's eyes or

his ears; the one cheats him more often, the other more deeply; but, by my faith! I know not why my lord called me here. If you be old friends you will have old tales to tell, and I never yet could listen patiently to an ancient story, or to the wit and mirth of sixty years and upwards. My own jests are sufficient for me, so, I pray you, jolly priest, don't flout me."

Father George bent down his eyes thoughtfully on the ground, and then shook his head somewhat mournfully, but looking up suddenly at length, he said, addressing Count Frederick, "Well, my good lord, I am glad at all events to see you safe returned. Have you any commands for me?"

"None, good father, none," replied Count Frederick. "I come but to ask a question or two.—I have found at the castle a youth named Ferdinand of Altenburg, who is he?"

"Methinks, noble lord," replied Father George; "that the name is enough to show you that he is of a noble race and kin; not so

rich as he might be, perhaps, but still with the hope of rising in the world. He was my ward, and is now in the train of the Count of Ehrenstein, serving him well I trust, for he was always well disposed and honourable."

"So is a cat," replied the jester, "rather thievishly disposed towards mice, but still an honourable beast, as the world goes, with a mighty soft tread, and a sleek skin well smoothed."

"But he is thievishly disposed to no one," answered Father George.

"By my faith! that is saying much for any man under ninety," rejoined the jester; "for there are many kinds of thievishness, which assault us at different stages of this world's journey; and I have seldom met with the male thing of twenty, or thereabouts, that would not steal a smile from beauty, or a heart if he could get it, in a very roguish manner."

"That is lawful robbery," said the priest, with a smile, "against which there is no commandment."

"Ay, if the church have its dues," cried the jester, "then things are easily managed; but Heaven help me! I blame not the youth, nor call him a cat either; I but said that Grimalkin is as honest as he."

"But not so bold, so brave, and so true," answered Father George, "else he belies his teaching."

"He seems brave enough, in truth," answered Count Frederick, "for he is even now gone to put his head into a lion's mouth."

"Ah! how is that?" exclaimed Father George, in evident surprise and alarm; "I knew not that he was going anywhere."

"He has gone to beard the Baron of Eppenfeld in his hold," answered the Count; "you can judge better, my good friend, what reception he is likely to meet with than I can."

"Comfortable lodging and good food," replied the jester, "if nothing worse; but clean straw, and bread and water may serve a man's turn very well, if it be not on compulsion. Compulsion is the salad of bitter

herbs, that makes all a man's meat have a hard flavour."

"And when does he propose to come back?" asked the monk, without noting Herr Von Narren's words.

"As soon as he can ride thither and return," said Count Frederick in reply; "he may be back by nine, I should think."

"He must have help in case of need," replied Father George, thoughtfully.

"That he shall have beyond all doubt," answered the nobleman; "depend upon it, no wrong shall befall him without vengeance from my hand."

"Ay, that is the way with all these great lords," exclaimed the jester; "vengeance is a part of their creed. Now a fool or a serf would think it better to stop evil deeds than to punish them: if I were to kill your horse, uncle, the beast would not be a bit better off for knowing that my head would pay the penalty. I say, let those who can, stop the doing of that which is amiss, and then there

will be no occasion for avenging it afterwards."

He spoke with a good deal of emphasis, and then turned round to the lattice-window and looked out, while the priest and his noble visitor conversed for some few minutes apart.

From time to time the eye of Count Frederick's strange companion wandered from the space immediately opposite the chapel, and from the group of attendants and men-at-arms it contained, up towards the castle, with a marking and significant glance. Whether by accident or design, I know not, but the chapel had been so built, that the window of that room, although it could not command the whole extent of the road, caught glimpses of it, even after the trees crossed it, at every fifty or sixty yards along the whole extent, and after gazing forth for two or three minutes, something seemed to catch and arrest the man's attention; for he suddenly smiled, laid his finger on his temple, and then, after having

watched for a moment or two more, turned quickly round, exclaiming, "Give you good-day," uncle Frederick; "I am away for a pot of honey, I see there;" and out of the door he strode without awaiting an answer. Hurrying up the hill, without mounting his horse, he had just passed the first turning in the wood, when he suddenly came upon the pretty maid Bertha, tripping down with a rapid step, and a cheek somewhat flushed.

"A fair afternoon to you, sweet lady," said the jester, taking her hand; "whither away so fast?"

"I am going to tell my beads at the chapel," said Bertha, evidently discomposed.

"A pious undertaking," cried the jester, "and easily performed, too, if there were none but pigeons in this world; but doves will meet with hawks, pretty mistress, when they fly out alone; and if I mistake not, something has ruffled your feathers."

Bertha laughed, blushing, and replied: "You saw him, then, sir?"

"I saw some one lay hold of you roughly," answered the jester; "but, in truth, my eyes are somewhat dim; for the passing of years will scratch the horn lantern, and though I came out to help you in case of need, I could not distinguish who it was."

"One of your good lord's followers," answered Bertha; "but it is no matter, I trust he will be less saucy henceforth, for I threatened to tell of him."

"If you threatened to tell and don't tell, pretty maid, be you sure that he will read the riddle to his own advantage. Otherwise, he will be as great a fool as I am, and I will leave him my cap and bauble for a legacy."

Just as the jester was uttering these words, the youth Martin of Dillberg appeared coming down with a stealthy step; and Bertha's companion exclaimed, "Ha! ha! Here we have him, and no tale told. For this he shall be punished enough."

"Nay, I beseech you," cried Bertha, "do

him no harm! He is a saucy boy; but he will not offend again."

"He has offended often enough already," answered the jester, "but fear not, pretty maid; I will not deal roughly. I will but set the dwarf upon him, and for the next three days he will lead the life of a strange fowl in a farm-yard—but see! as soon as his eye lights upon me, he creeps away amongst the trees. That youth will fall upon some evil thing before he is done. Now hie thee on to the chapel, and tell thy beads in peace; though, Heaven help us! if all the love tales were counted that lie under a rosary, they would drown the paters and aves, I fear."

"I am going to tell no love tale," answered Bertha, colouring and walking on. "I wish I had a love tale to tell."

The jester laughed, and followed towards the chapel, saying, "It must be a luckless place this castle of Ehrenstein, not to furnish a pretty maiden with such a bosom-friend.

Perhaps your sweet mistress cannot say the same."

"I never pry into my mistress's affairs," cried Bertha, "I know nothing of them."

But the jester's keen eye was upon her as she spoke, and he exclaimed with a provoking smile, "Ha! ha! thy warm cheek is as red as thy warm lip, fair maid; and, on my troth, I can forgive Martin of Dillberg for tasting both. Why, you tell-tale, if you guard your face no better, it is useless putting a bridle on your tongue."

"It is because you teaze me," answered Bertha, petulantly; "I declare, Martin of Dillberg was better than you are, so I shall hurry on, and do without your company."

The jester followed, but not very rapidly; and when Bertha saw the horsemen standing at the chapel gate, she paused, and seemed to hesitate; but then taking heart of grace, she hastened forward again, and, without looking to the right or left, approached the shrine.

Her orisons were somewhat long, for the

Count, and the jester, who had again entered the good priest's cell, remained there for half an hour, and when they came forth and rode on towards the Abbey, Bertha was still at prayer.

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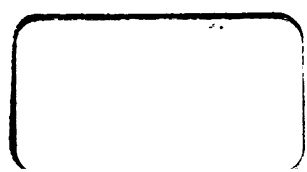
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